A POWERFUL NEW SERIAL COMMENCES IN THIS NUMBER.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 386. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 23RD, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

Grand Pioneer Reduction Sale

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement.

OUR NEW VENTURE! Yes, Two Different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! (Copyright).

Whereas, in launching forth our New Production, THE "PRUDENTIAL" CARPETS AND HEARTHRUGS, we beg to state they will have a Rich Turkish and Persian Design on one side, and on the reverse he elegant and costly designs of Wilton make. The advantage thus gained is great, as they can be utilised in various rooms at one cost. This is a valuable step in economy.

PRODIGIOUS SALE OF THE

"PRUDENTIAL" Reversible CARPETS

(Registered.)

Reversible, with a different pattern on both sides, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 10 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian with the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down and cannot be excelled in durability.

	Each.		Each
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. " " "	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. " " "	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft. " " "	11/6	12ft. by 21ft. " " "	22/6

When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

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The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpets she ordered."

Blairquhan, Maybole, N.B., August 3rd.
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Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

No. 386.] For the Week ending May 23rd, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

A Porcelain Cup.

ONE morning as I was strolling through the streets in the neighbourhood of the Opera, I stopped in front of a shop of curiosities and antiquities and ran my eye over the different articles displayed in the window, of which the majority were old acquaintances, and some of which had passed through my own hands.

As I was about to pass on, the door of the shop opened and who should come out but my friend Octave Ducrozel, whom I had not seen for several months. The moment he saw me, he came forward, and I noticed that he seemed annoyed, and his hand trembled in a way that I had never known before.

"What has happened?" I inquired. "You look worried?"

"Oh! those women, those women!" he growled in a voice that seemed addressed to his own reflections rather than to me. "Do not trust their promises, do not place any confidence in their vows! It's enough to make a man blow out his brains!"

"I'll see that you don't do that," I said; "I shall stick to you like your own shadow."

"If you only knew," continued the poor fellow. "And it is only five years ago. I was in love, head over heels in love. I loved with all the passion and intensity of a first love. It was with a beautiful young girl at Batignolles. She was staying with her mother, and in order to remain by her side as long as she lived, she had refused many offers of marriage. Louise Audry was as lovely as she was noble in her devotion to her mother.

"You know how the heart loves to adorn the object of its affections with all the graces and charms imaginable. I was fortunate enough, too, to prove not displeasing to Louise, and before long we had formed the delighful plan of uniting our destinies and getting married. We decided to wait two or three months before taking the final step.

"Unexpected events, however, caused a different disposal of our plans. Compelled to take a long journey, of which the termination seemed doubtful, I found myself obliged to postpone the wedding until my return. When we said good-bye, Louise gave me a faithful promise to wait for me as long as events might make it necessary.

"As a token of my tender affection I begged her acceptance of an extremely beautiful porcelain goblet that had been left to me by my grandmother, and which I cherished as the apple of my eye. Louise was delighted to possess an article that would constantly remind her of me, and promised that whatever might happen she would not suffer it to leave her possession.

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"Those were her last words. Shortly after they fell from her beautiful red lips I started on my journey.

"Four years passed, as you know, before I returned to France. During that time I was in the centre of Africa, conducting explorations, and practically exiled from the world, receiving no news and able to send none.

"As soon as I arrived in Paris I hurried to see Louise, to whom I had telegraphed from Marseilles. Alas! what a cruel deception was in store for me!

"The house she used to live in had been torn down and removed by the construction of a new street. No one knew where Madame Audry and her daughter had gone to live, and all my efforts to trace them were ineffectual and vain.

"Several months have gone by since then without bringing any news to change the unhappy state of affairs.

"This morning, while looking through the shops to find a birthday present for my sister I went by chance into the shop where you have just met me.

"While searching about for something that would make a present a little out of the ordinary run I walked up and down the shop in front of the show cases and let no corner escape my attention. In this way I found myself at length in front of a tall case with closed glass windows, beside which a young girl was sitting with some embroidery work in her hands.

"And in this glass case, just about the height of my eyes, what should I see standing on a shelf behind the shining glass pane but the old porcelain goblet that I had given to Louise. Yes, the very same it was! The exquisite piece of Sèvres that had such deep significance for me and with which so many tender memories and associations were linked.

"At first I was inclined to doubt my eyes, but on looking closer it was no longer possible, for I knew every detail of it by heart, and I recognised them all beyond the possibility of being mistaken.

"There was a wreath of flowers so finely and delicately worked in with threads of gold and silver, forming a crown work in which alternated harmoniously a superb rose cluster, with leaves and buds and a bunch of dainty little flowers, red and blue! I could not mistake it. There, too, was the artistic mounting that I knew so well, with the three bronze supports representing the heads of animals peering forth out of dense foliage, and chiselled by the hand of a master.

"My surprise speedily gave place to indignation, as you may well understand. This treasure of my heart in a shop! This gem linked with so many family traditions and representing the faithfulness of my first love, exposed to the public eye of the chance and ordinary buyer.

"In spite of her solemn oath she had sold the goblet—and forgotten me who gave it her. Oh! woman, woman, woman, all and always the same, you are the personification of inconstancy and the lie!

"Naturally, you will understand, I had only one thought in my mind—to buy the goblet back again. I asked the price.

"'Ah! Monsieur,' answered the clerk, 'the precious objects in that case are in special care of Madame Burnard, the proprietress, and she alone attends to any business connected with them. Madame Burnard has just gone out, and I can't say nothing about them. Perhaps mademoiselle has some instructions.'

"'No,' answered the young girl thus addressed, putting down her embroidery and raising her eyes to me. 'Mother takes charge of all in the case, monsieur, and I have not even the key. My mother will return at six o'clock and monsieur will, perhaps, look in again to-night.'

"I said that I would do so and left the shop."

"*Eh, bien!* My dear Octave," I said, interrupting my friend in his tale, "we will both go there together, for I do not mean to leave your side until this matter is cleared up."

"Cleared up!" he exclaimed impatiently; "there's no clearing up about it. The solution is evident and obvious. I am forgotten and my token has been thrown away and sold."

Poor Octave! His heart was full of bitterness. Apparently disappointed and deceived in his first love, he was ready to curse the whole sex and to class them one and all as false, faithless, and cruel.

At six o'clock we returned to the shop. Octave entered alone and I walked up and down outside waiting for him and looking in at the shop window. I had to wait a long time, nearly an hour. Evidently the interview was not hurrying on with winged feet.

At length my friend came, his face radiant.

"Well," I cried, "have you got your goblet?"

"Yes, no; that is to say, I have it and I haven't it! Ah! my friend. I hardly know what I am saying, I am so upset, so happy! Ah! do you know that women are angels? Don't you understand me?"

"I must confess that—er——"

"Well, I'll tell you all about it. The moment I entered the shop the little girl with the embroidery met me and said her mother had just come in.

"I followed her to the farther end of the shop, where, in the semi-darkness I saw a woman coming to meet me.

"'Madame,' I said, 'there is in your show-case an article that I feel disposed to purchase.'

"'Yes, monsieur, I know,' she answered quickly. 'You refer to the old porcelain goblet. I regret it exceedingly, monsieur, but it is not for sale. It is only here to be kept for the one person who has the right to reclaim it and to whom it belongs.'

"'And how do you know, madam, that I am not the person?'

"At this moment the clerk lit the gas and we found ourselves suddenly face to face in the strong light.

"'Louise!'

"'Octave!'

"This unexpected meeting naturally caused long explanations. These Louise gave me frankly and freely. When their house was pulled down Madame Audry and her daughter left Batignolles to live in Paris. A short time after there was a financial catastrophe which made a great stir and ruined many people, among them Madame Audry. The old woman shortly afterwards died of grief and disappointment.

"Without news of me and in a condition of hopelessness and despair Louise found herself at the end of her strength and resources, when an old friend of her mother, a M. Burnard, who kept a curiosity shop, turned up to help her. He was a widower, over sixty years of age, and with a young daughter on his hands he found himself rapidly going into a decline.

"Anxious to find some one who would be a friend to the girl after his death, and knowing the kind heart of Louise, he offered her his name, his house and his home.

"That is how Louise became Madame Burnard and was called mother without being a mother; how the goblet always remained in her possession, and how I have the pleasure now to announce our approaching marriage, at which I trust you will do me the honour to be best man."

Honor Lucelle.

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IN * THE * DARK.

THE darkness was intense, and it had a singularly depressing effect on me as I groped along, stealthily following the rustling sound of a woman's dress. In the pursuit, I had climbed many stone stairways, and at last I found myself walking on a narrow ledge, scarcely wide enough to afford a safe footing. With my cane I reached over the ledge, but not far, as I could touch nothing, and a feeling of dread came over me lest I should lose my balance. To my left was the wall, which arched so low as to compel me to stoop in walking.

The associations surrounding the uncanny place added to the horror of my situation. The building was in a deserted quarter of the city of Mexico. The massive pile had for many years been abandoned by all reputable persons and pursuits. Its labyrinthine interior was a safe refuge for a horde of murderous marauders. Many a brave officer of the law, while searching for a criminal, had been stabbed to death by a hand suddenly thrust from one of the dark recesses.

Only the week before, a prominent and respected citizen had been murdered within these dread precincts. His beautiful daughter, Dolores, had formed an attachment for a handsome and dashing young fellow, named Manuel Lopez. He was the leader of a band of free-booters who made their headquarters in the building.

The father took some determined steps and thought he had broken up the affair; but one day a rumour reached him that Dolores often met her lover in that retreat.

One night he followed her, and, to his intense grief, found that the rumour was true. He awaited the meeting, and then rushed at Lopez with the fury of a tiger. The next instant the father fell with a fatal knife-thrust in his heart. The funeral took place amid general lamentations, and a large reward was offered for the apprehension of the murderer.

A number of mounted officers scoured the neighbouring country; but from the first I was convinced that Lopez had not left his den. From what I could learn of the girl, I was also certain that she had not even yet entirely deserted her lover.

My watch of seven days and nights was now rewarded by the reappearance of the girl in the building, and, notwithstanding my fears, I cautiously followed the rustling sound of the dress in the darkness before me.

By an occasional glimmer, it was evident that the girl had a faint light to guide her steps. Fortunately she moved slowly, and I was enabled to follow closely by carefully feeling my way with my cane and outstretched hand.

Suddenly I was checked in my pursuit by a startling incident. The girl stopped, the glimmering light entirely disappeared, and I heard a voice, low, but vehement with rapturous delight:

"Dolores, my darling! I knew you would come to me, that your love would show you that I was not to blame. And it was not my fault, I swear to you. He sprang at me like a wild beast, and not knowing what I did, I drew my knife in self-defence—and killed him. I acted on the swift impulse of the moment, and surely you cannot blame me."

"I do not blame you," the girl said slowly and with infinite sadness in her tones; "but we must part for ever. I came to-night to bid you a last farewell."

"Ah, do not say that, Dolores!" came the man's voice, in desperate pleading; "see, I could not act otherwise. For your sake, I would never have harmed him—yes, I could even have fought for him; but he came upon me like the wind, he gave me no time for thought—I knew only that one of us must die. Consider, how would it have been had he lived, had he killed me? Could you have been his child again? No; you had chosen me and I but served your love when I preserved my life. Think, dear one, you were mine by Fate's decree, and are you the less mine that I have taken the only course against a man who would have killed me?"

"It cannot be, it cannot be, Manuel," moaned the girl hopelessly; "my father's blood is upon your head, and we must part for ever."

"Come, come, Dolores, be not too hasty. You must take time to think. Come, let me lead you to a seat. Why do you draw back from me? I know every foot of the way here, and can find my way as easily in the dark as in the light. Besides, would it be so great a harm if we should fall over this ledge—we, whose love is greater than love of life itself? It is many feet to the stone floor of the court below, and I have heard it said that before falling half the distance, one's breath is taken away and death comes as peacefully as sleep to a babe. Come, Dolores, come!"

There was a sound as if the girl were being half led, half dragged over the stones. She uttered an entreating moan which thrilled me through and through with horror. Little wonder that she was frightened and unwilling to follow her lover; his pleading earnestness had changed to a desperate, despairing tone. I felt that he was about to commit some other dreadful deed, but I was powerless to interfere. The ledge along which I had been feeling my way ended abruptly, and my cane failed to touch a further footing in any direction.

Suddenly the noise of dragging, intermingled with moans from the girl, ceased, and the next instant from *below* I heard a terrible shriek, followed by sounds as if falling objects were striking against projections in a rapid descent. Then all was still again.

I peered into the darkness for a moment till I heard a murmur of voices. At last a lantern was brought. It revealed a group of horror-stricken men gathered round two prostrate forms which lay on the stone floor far below. They were the mangled bodies of Manuel Lopez and Dolores, fallen upon almost the same stone where the father had poured out his life's blood a few nights before.

CLARA MEGANDEL.

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I HOLD it ain't right for a woman to make eyes at a man when he's scarce half her age—not that I want to draw a line at when I consider a woman has no business to be thinking about making love; that's not my meaning.

But when the chap's eighteen, and soft as butter and the girl's thirty-five, and hard as nails, it don't seem to be the square thing.

This business grew out of nothing, right under my nose, and I never see it till all the fat's afire. Here am I, skipper of the *Merrylegs*, as tidy a craft as ever nosed her way through the "Swatch." And there, living in Rochester, is my Lucy and her mother. Then here, aboard with me, is my mate, Jacob Faithful—so named after that chap of Marryat's, for want of a better, by them as found him when a kid bellowing on the workhouse steps.

It's the voyage after I'm married. Lucy is sailing with me for the first time. I don't know about anything else.

So the morning we're ready for sea I go up to the office for orders.

The Guv'nor thinks he will walk down to the wharf to see me off. He knows a thing or two, for his age, does the Guv'nor.

It's about half-past ten and high water when we reach the wharf. The *Merrylegs* is lying off in the stream all ready for up and away when we sighted her as we come out of the street.

"Hallo, Merton!" says the Guv'nor, "who have you got aboard?"

"Lumme!" says I, "I know the Missis is there, but that ain't her." Lawd! you might have knocked me down with a corn plaster, for just as I spoke Lucy comes up the kebbin steps and waves her hand to me, and the other one turns about and waves hers, too.

"Sir," says I—for I'm bound to give him an answer—"it's her mother; she's coming round to Dover to show Lucy the ropes."

"All right!" says the Guv'nor sharp like. "Get on board and look slippery while there's a slant!" So I row on board in a kind of fluster, wondering where in thunder we're going to stow the old lady in a bawge that's only got one kebbin.

However, as it's Lucy's mother, I suppose I've got to put a good face on it. But I says to myself as I row off:

"Tom, that old lady's your mother-in-law. If you don't fix her off she'll be sailing with Lucy to teach her the ropes more days than you care about. Tom," I says, "you don't want Lucy to know the ropes. She's very well as she is. Besides, there ain't any teaching as you can't teach." So I pull alongside, make the boat fast, and jump on board. I've made up my mind to do the polite thing by the old lady.

"Good-morning, Mother!" says I, goin' up to her, "glad to see you."

Then she turns round, and I see it's not Lucy's mother at all, but a party I don't know no more than Adam.

"Missis!" says I, gulping down my feelings—which was for cussing—"and what may you want with the *Merrylegs?*"

"I think you are very rude!" she answers pert as you like; "ask that gentleman."

That gentleman's the mate, and he's blundering acrost the hatches in big sea boots and guernsey, looking as sick as a stuck sheep.

"It's all right, Skipper," he says, "she's a friend of mine; I've promised her a sea trip to Dover."

"Faithful!" says I, "is it a widder? 'cos if so bring her up wiv a round turn!"

"Skipper!" says he, "I——" then he stopped short as a run down clock and she takes up the running.

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"Captain," she says, smiling at me for all she's worth.

"Don't be angry with Jacob—I am very sorry if I am incommoding you, but Jacob and I are old friends; you'll let me go, won't you?"

"You've got to go," says I, "for we'll be under weigh in ten minutes."

As I look at her, and then at Faithful, standing there so sheepish, I remember that yarn about him being nobody's kid in particular, and the workhouse steps, so I says to myself: "Tom, you're treadin' on somebody's corns more nor a trifle. Up mud hook and away!"

So I turn to the mate: "Heave short, my son!" says I, "and trundle that main sheet aft as you go along."

Then I turn to my lady, and I says: "Missis, I've got to take you willy-nilly. There's my guv'nor standing on the wharf. I'm late now. It's more than my berth's worth to stop and put you ashore, even if that was your wish."

"Oh, well!" she says, "I hope you've 'got something to eat; it's hungry work at sea, I hear."

"As for that," I answered, "there's a brace of pheasants, anyway."

"Pheasants?" says she. "Now that will be a treat. Where do you keep them?"

"They are hanging over your head, Missis," I says, as I'm hauling aft the main sheet. "Cawn't you smell 'em?"

"Them!" she says, looking up.

"Aye, Missis, that's my meaning! Anchor away there, Faithful!"

"I call 'em bloaters!" she sniffs out disdainful, getting up and going to the kebbin scuttle.

"It's all right, Skipper."

"A trifle of difference in names, Missis," says I. "Up fores'l; look slippery, my son!"

With that, Lucy, who has been standing in the waist, watching, comes aft to me, and tucking her arm through mine as I stand at the wheel, looks up and says:

"Tom, what's the matter with Faithful?"

"Faithful, lass?" I asks; "why, what's adrift?"

"He's queer, Tom; he does nothing but heave sighs."

"Heave crab-winches he may, lass," says I, "or the windlass for that matter; but sighs—lumme! who ever tell of 'em? Maybe it's a pint of four 'alf he's thinking of."

"Captain, may I come down?"

"Na—a—a!" says Lucy, smiling and dodging away from me, "it's something softer than that."

By this time the mains'l is drawing, so the mate slips the bowline, kicks the foresheet down to leeward, and comes aft.

"Take hold here, Faithful," says I, "and keep your eyes lifting; I'm going below."

When I get into the kebbin Lucy's getting ready a bit of grub.

"When did that party come aboard, lass?" I asked.

"I don't know, Tom. The mate says she's his girl."

"That's as maybe, lass," says I, as I climb on the lockers to take a squint out of the skylight, for I'd heard a sound of giggling. "Anyway he's hugging her pretty close now, lumme! I must go on deck, else we'll be head first into something along of his foolin'."

Whether they heard me speaking or what I don't know, but just as I'm going up the kebbin steps, my lady comes tripping along lively as you like, and smiling down at me, says: "Captain, may I come down? I should like one of those pheasants you were speaking about."

"Pheasants is off!" says I, short like, for I had a notion she was fooling me, "but you may come down if you like an' have a bit of what's going."

So down she comes, as daintily as you wish, showing just a glimpse of as pretty a foot and ankle as you—well, there. There's no two ways about it, she was all a toff, although what's coming may give that statement the lie.

"Captain," she says, smiling very prettily at the pair of us, "I'm so sorry to be in the way. I had no notion you were just married—newly-wed couples ought to be left in peace." With that she sighs as though her heart would break.

"As for that," says I, savage like, and looking at Lucy's face going crimson, "we'd as lief have been without you."

"Oh, you dear, outspoken man," she says, smiling for all she's worth; "I do love to hear one speak one's mind without any beating about the bush. Now I suppose you want to know what brought me here?"

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"It's a matter as wants a trifle of clearin', Missis," says I.

"Well," she goes on quite amiable, "I live at Dover, but I've been staying in London. Yesterday I came down to Rochester to do some sketching, and had all my money stolen whilst I sat in the Castle grounds. I had not a farthing left. I was in terrible distress and

"Lucy, lass!" I whisper, "look here."

wandered about hopelessly searching everywhere for my bag."

"You might have gone to the police, Missis," says I, "they'd have telegraft for you."

"Captain," she says, shuddering same as if she'd seen a rat, "I did think of it—I tried to do it, but I couldn't. Men look with suspicion on ladies in such predicaments as I was in."

"There's something in that," says I.

"So I was out all night, Captain, all the weary, cold, dark night."

"Which was warm enough, Missis," says I.

"Aye!" she answers wistful, "for you—for you and your sweet wife—but for me—oh! it was awful!"

"Well cheer up now, anyway," says I. "We'll put you ashore at Dover."

She was silent a while, then went on.

"But the curious part of it is, that when I met the mate, he reminded me most forcibly of a dear friend of mine at Dover. He told me something of his sad history, and wonderful as it may seem, I believe I shall be able to find his mother for him. Her little boy was stolen when he was but a few weeks old. The nurse disappeared at the same time."

"Faithful seems to have fell on his feet all round the shop" says I. Then, as breakfast was ready, we fell to, and for a toff, I think that party took the cake. She got outside of more grub than me and Lucy put together; which was laying it on pretty thick, seeing she's only a lodger.

There's a light westerly breeze all down the Medway, and I stay at the wheel till we get off the "Spaniard." Then I go below. It's four o'clock when I come on deck again.

I step up the ladder and take a look. The mate's at the wheel and my lady's standing beside him looking into his face with that queer smile of hers.

"Lucy, lass!" I whisper, "look here."

"'Tain't fair, Tom," says she, squeezing up beside me, and gripping hold of my arm. "She's foolin' him!"

"Think so, lass?"

"Sure, Tom; she's not for the likes of him!"

With that I slip on deck, and get a glimpse of the gossoon's face before he sees me. He's staring at her like a screech owl blinking at the daylight, and there's a flag flying on the mizzen-truck.

"Have done this foolin', Faithful!" says I; "what's the flag up for?"

"Oh, I asked him to hoist it," says my lady, "I think it makes the ship look quite gay."

"This ship's a bawge, Missis," I says, "and don't need to look gay. Haul it down, mate!"

I take the wheel at this, and we go sailing down the coast over a sea that's dancing in the sunlight astern like a sheet of glawse.

There's a lot of yachts about with their pretty white sails and tapering spars, looking for all the world like the butterflies they are.

One of 'em, a smart cutter of about forty tons, came cruising past us as though she's a steamboat. My lady, who's sitting on the hatches forward of me, pulls out her handkerchief and waves it to the chaps on board.

"What's that for, Missis?" I asks, for she seems to me to be bossing the whole show.

"Captain!" she laughs, "why not? Who could help wishing them luck?"

"If that's all—there's an end!" says I, "and no harm done."

After that we crept on quietly till about five o'clock, when as we are making no head against the tide, we drop the kellick (anchor) about a couple of miles this side of Mawgit Hook.

When night comes on, I'm for fixing up a spare lodging in the kebbin for my lady, but she won't hear of it. She'll stay on deck wrapped in her rug. Well, I don't like to press the point, so it's as she says.

It draws on to about nine o'clock, and as fine a night as ever the stars blinked down upon. There's no moon yet, and I'm sitting dozing over my pipe on the kebbin lockers, when I see a kind of sickly glare stealing down the skylight. It's not fire. I know that. It's some thundering mystification having to do with my lady.

I crawl up the ladder quiet as you like. The whole decks, rigging, spars, and everything are standing out in a blaze of sickly shimmering light. Only for a second though. Then there's a hiss, and all is as dark as you like.

Out on deck I go, savage at being too late.

"What's up there, Missis!" I yells; "who are you wishing good-bye to now?"

"Me!" cries my lady. "Why, Captain, how you frighten one; I was fast asleep!"

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'Didn't see no blue lights, I suppose?"

"Blue lights? what's that?" she questions, simple as a child.

"You saw a blue light!" says I, turning and running for'ard to Faithful, who's lying down in the folds of the fores'l.

"Na-a-a," says he, "I were asleep, Skipper."

This set me adrift. I know I'm half asleep myself and may have been mistaken. So after a while I get aft again and down into the kebbin.

I'm terrible wakeful all the rest of the night. At times I doze on the lockers—for I never turned in—and dream of blue lights, blue women, blue devils. At last, towards two o'clock, I wake with a start and spring up quickly with the feeling of something ghostly creeping past me. But there's nothing there only the kebbin and the darkness. But across my ears comes a sound that isn't born of the night. It's a sort of rasping noise I don't understand. Rousing Lucy, an' telling her to dress quickly, I'm up the ladder like a shot, blaring out into the darkness like a fool. Presently I make out a shadowy outline of sails stealing quietly past. I look for'ard—there's three lights on our bow-board.

"Faithful!" I shouts, "is it Bank Holiday and midnight illuminations of the Gawdings, or what's up?"

But there's no answer, only the scuttling of chaps getting into a boat in a hurry.

"Lumme!" says I, "if this here bawge ain't gone mad, chalk me up for a fool."

Then I got for'ard as quick as may be. As I go along there's a splashing of oars alongside, and a boat rows away into the night. I see no more, for a blinding flash leaps out of the darkness, and I fall to the deck like a dead man.

But I'm not hit, I'm only stunned by coming down against the fore-hatch. It's Faithful that's hit, and lies like a heap of old clothes acrost the hatch combings.

On the deck is a group of coastguards.

* * * * *

It's an hour from then to when I come too. Then I pick myself up and see Lucy bending over me with a face as white as the dead. Faithful is still acrost the hatches, and the dawn's creeping up over Mawgit sands astern. Away out there in the blink of the sun, a yacht is stealing quietly away, pretty near hull down. And here on the deck is a group of coastguards standing watching us all.

"Feel better, skipper?" says the officer. "What's been adrift?"

"Lumme!" says I, "it's all adrift, along of them petticoats. Ask Faithful, maybe he knows."

But Faithful don't know anything for some while yet. The chaps are busy patching up the wound he got—it's not much, but it bleeds fast and has to be stopped.

"Captain!" says Faithful presently, speaking weak as a licked dawg, "better look what's in them casks."

"What casks?" says I, then I turn and see two lying on the deck beside the windlass, and that some of the batches is off.

"Cement's in them, mate; what are they got up for?"

"They've taken away two; you came up and stopped the rest."

"Taken away two?" says I; "Faithful, that's more than your week 'll come to!"

"Skipper!" says he, "it's like this. We're loading at the wharf, and the day before we sail, that female party that's just cleared out came down to the bawge and persuaded me to let her stow four casks aboard, fore side the cargo. I see no harm in this—she's wanting to go to Dover Well, I let her. She made a point of finding mother at Dover for me. She's a swell, and she knows her quite well. Skipper! it was that as done it, that, and the twinkle of her bright eyes. Then comes the night we're sailing. Down to the wharf she comes and diddles me out of the way whiles her chums slip on board. It's too late to make a song about it, and I think they're just wanting a trip to Dover, too, and say nothing.

"To-night I was for calling you when I see that yacht coming down and her burning blue lights. But she puts her arms round my neck, and they's so soft, skipper—and the blather of her finishes it."

"Roll those casks here," says the coastguard officer. "Knock their heads in!"

"It's broaching cargo," says I.

"Fiddlesticks!" says he.

In a few minutes they are opened and the stuffs pouring out on deck.

"Cement!" says I.

"Turn 'em out!" says he.

"Cement—cement," says I. "Bloody cement!" says he, and then—a foot—an arm—a leg—head, trunk and all came trundling across the deck smothered in cement dust.

"That cawsk was for overboard!" says Faithful; "they were at it when you come!"

Then we capsized the other, and it's silver—plate they called it—and jewels—some in boxes, some stowed in paper—enough to stock a shop!

"Lumme!" says I, "if this ain't a start, chalk me up a fool!"

And a start it is before we've done with it, what with chasing that yacht and losing her, and inquests, and trials, and judges, we get it laid on pretty thick. For there's been a burglary at a big house back of Rochester, and murder thrown in. It's all in the papers whiles we are at Dover. And this chap as they were going to cremate was the butler that tried to save his master's property and got fixed up like jugged hare by that pawty as came their game on Faithful.

Edward Noble.

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A SAINT.

SHE walked her daily path with the calm eyes of a Madonna. "Mrs. Chetwynd," the old permanent gossips would say to the new, temporary, or come-to-stay gossips. "Why, don't you know? The English Consul's wife. Oh, she is a saint. No one ever says a word against her." The last clause was invariably spoken in a way to give the impression that possibly other "hers," might have words said against them. And this, of course, was true. That little tropical mountain capital 5,000 feet up from the rank and steaming vegetation of the coasts on either side, held an English-American colony whose chief pastime was the destroyal, attempted or effectual, of reputations. Everyone professed to have his or her favourites and intimate friends; there were several cliques, according to superstitious or self-asserted social position, and each clique hated all the others.

Of course, there was a little English chapel in the town; the Spanish Catholic tolerance smiled upon it. And in this chapel, Sunday after Sunday, the English speaking colony was wont to meet, kneel, rehearse the Litany, and listen to a sermon read—usually—by the English Consul. Sylvia Chetwynd, the English Consul's wife, was in her pew sabbath after sabbath, with a face of faultless regularity of feature, and Greville Chetwynd, her husband, led the service as best a layman might. Greville was half-way popular. His Sunday face was just a little different from his weekday face. On week-days he bought and sold coffee and did an exchange business, with rasping and grasping care to have the latest one half per cent. rise on the right side, generally his own. On Sundays he was affected and mincing, some people said. A traveller for a Scotch firm of whiskey exporters dared to wonder aloud one morning in the Hotel Cantina, how Mrs. Chetwynd had come to fancy such a man. And a great silence fell on the idle crowd and shut him off. "Oh, she's a saint. No one can say anything about her," was the verdict.

Lorrimer Dewitt therefore held his peace. He was a sober fellow, tasting as little as possible the wares of the house he represented. He travelled a good deal with various other lines of goods, and he had found that nothing paid him so well as that which went to allay the beautiful—and universal—thirst in the land. Therefore he continued in this line. Not remaining in one spot very long, he could well afford to remain neutral and friendly to all the various cliques, not uniting his interests with any in particular.

Of course he had to cut some figure in the English speaking colony, however, and of course he would naturally meet now and then, the English Consul's wife. He rarely went to the consulate, but Mrs. Chetwynd went about a good deal. She had the excellent custom of visiting the orphan asylums, of carrying books and papers to the hospitals, of gracing with her presence various charity entertainments, such as concerts and fairs, provided they did not occur on Sunday. She was indeed a saint.

Lorrimer Dewitt admired her cold, calm beauty, the purity of her oval face, the large angelic blue eyes.

And yet she impressed him curiously. Was it merely the coldness, he caught himself wondering. Sometimes he fancied he had seen such a face before. But where? The idea was too vague. She was always courteously amiable to him—nothing more. She seemed ever to insist upon a certain distance between herself and others—especially men.

Of this, of course, he approved. A woman cannot be too careful. There was that little Mrs. Maclean, the civil engineer's wife—always in trouble, always doing things—always causing talk! Lorrimer liked Mrs. Maclean, in an honest, straightforward way, and thought it a pity that her husband was such a peculiar tempered, uncertain sort of fellow. Yet he couldn't deny that Mrs. Maclean often did imprudent things.

Dewitt had begun to think of leaving for the north. It was a soft-skied, cloudy day in June, early in the rainy season. His sales had been good, and he had a fancy to go back home.

Bob Maclean had spoken of going. Dewitt was not over anxious for his company, yet, since no one else was likely to sail, thought he would find out if it were true. One evening he strolled over to the little house opposite the Cathedral Plaza, where the Macleans had apartments. It was a two-story house, a doctor had the ground floor, and a staircase led from the patio, full of glorious jessamine and yellow roses. On the staircase, almost at the top, Lorrimer Dewitt paused, hesitating and in trepidation. Sobs—surely a woman's sobs. If poor little Mrs. Maclean were unhappy he must not commit the indiscretion of an intrusion. But, on the other hand, how to withdraw without being heard? Irresolute he halted there. Then some one came out of a room on the long landing above. Dewitt coughed, and was relieved to hear the voice of Bob Maclean:

"That you, Mr. Dewitt? Come along up. Glad to see you. I'm all alone."

Dewitt grasped at the fiction with satisfaction.

"Yes, I thought you were alone. I believe I saw Mrs. Maclean with—with Mrs. Chetwynd over on the other side of the square."

Maclean looked at him with a blank sort of pallor or a pallid sort of blankness.

"With Mrs. Chetwynd? No. I hardly think so." He tried to laugh. "They are not very good friends."

"No?" said Dewitt carelessly. Then he changed the subject. "Have you decided about going home yet?"

"Yes, I'm going."

"Will Mrs. Maclean accompany you?"

"No; I believe she will stay here. You see I'm making a sort of flying trip. Coming back."

"You'll go down to the port by the Friday train, no doubt?"

"Yes, not sooner. It's a nuisance waiting over even one day in the coast heat. I don't see why the trains can't connect better."

There was an uneasy silence for a few seconds. Then Dewitt rose.

"I won't stay longer since we are to be voyage

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companions. I'm rather busy, making up accounts. Please give my respectful regards to your wife. I'll see you to-morrow, of course. Anyway, Friday. Good-night."

Dewitt returned to his hotel, wondering what Maclean's poor little wife's latest trouble had arisen from. He did not go to bed at once, but sat in the narrow covered balcony smoking. It was Wednesday night. Three nights more and he would be at sea—he and Bob Maclean. Susie Maclean would be alone, and probably ears deep in her 999th indiscretion. She was a good little woman, thoroughly pure-minded, he knew in his heart, but she would do wild things. The mountain atmosphere seemed constantly to have gone to her head.

He sat smoking there until after midnight. Finally he ceased to smoke, and sat half inclined to doze in the warmth of the night, which seemed to lave him like a warm, perfumed bath. In the shadow of a post he sat motionless and unobserved. Two figures passed below, slowly, quietly. The streets were deserted and noiseless. He could hear the words of the couple—a man and a woman.

"Yes, of course—but I must go. There is no help."

"You will not take her?" The woman spoke between her teeth in a curious mandatory tone.

"No, I have told you."

And they passed on.

The voice of the man was Bob Maclean. But whose voice was the woman's?

An hour later, retiring into his mosquito canopy, Lorrimer Dewitt was still uneasy over the question.

He had heard no voice like that save one—pshaw! Absurd. The voice of the wife of the English Consul!

"A saint, they call her!" He dozed off to sleep.

The next day he forgot about the Macleans until evening. Then he chanced to pass their house. The little woman was at the street door. She looked sad and heavy-eyed.

"You will be lonely," he said, moved by some sudden impulse. "Why don't you make your husband bring you along?"

"Oh, he doesn't want me," she answered, forcing a laugh.

Dewitt did not linger; he knew too well the gossip that might result.

He was at his hotel and in bed early that night, having arranged to be called at six the next morning for the early train to the port.

About midnight a commotion in the house aroused him. He got up hastily and partly dressed, fearful of fire or earthquake. Then he went out in the upper corridor and there met someone.

"What's the matter?"

"They sent to awaken Dr. Adair, Dr. Garcia was away."

"Some one ill?"

"Why, it was at Mr. Maclean's. It seems there was an accident with his pistol, and he is shot—dying, they think."

Dewitt went back to his room. He trembled with a nervous chill as he hastily put on his clothes—not omitting an overcoat.

Within ten minutes he had crossed the plaza. The house was alive with people. And Maclean was dead.

From the man-servant Dewitt managed to obtain a few coherent particulars. Maclean had shot himself while cleaning his revolver preparatory to packing it in his bag. He had been getting ready for the early morning start. There was a letter for Mr. Dewitt. The servant thought it was something about the luggage. It was sealed and addressed, and Mr. Maclean had spoken of wanting it sent round very early.

"Get me the letter," said Dewitt hoarsely. He was trembling violently now.

The servant returned and put it in his hand. Dewitt left the house, returned to his hotel, and there in his room, with his door locked, broke the seal.

It was brief:

"You are an honest man and a gentleman. Be a friend to poor Susie. Life is become unendurable for me. Susie is blameless, but she is not legally my wife. The woman who once bore that name is still alive, and is here in this place. No one suspects her. She deserted me. I thought her dead, and married Susie. I never thought to meet the first one here. The world is round and small—too small. She holds a threatening hand over me, and I am desperate. I simply cut it all. She is cold, cruel, fascinating, wicked. I have been wild about her. I might be so again—her power is great. Poor Susie! I spare her. I am wild and sick of life. I trust you."

Lorrimer Dewitt sealed up the letter, and put it carefully away among his things.

He did not take the early train. He remained to try and look after his dead friend's widow.

The funeral took place that afternoon, with necessary tropical haste. Only men—according to the country's custom—accompanied the remains to the grave.

Returning from the cemetery, he met the wife of the English Consul going to the hospital, her arms full of books and flowers. A courteous smile came over her pale and saintly features as she bowed.

He raised his hat and looked her straight in the eyes The echo rang in his ears of the clay falling on Maclean's coffin. They passed each other without a word.

AGNES JEWLEY

The Schwanthaler Serum

For at least a week Dr. Cornelius Schwanthaler had been in a state of great excitement; which, in the circumstances, was not at all surprising. Fired by the discovery of the "X" rays, and animated by the desire to do something which should make his name known to the same extent as that of Professor Röntgen, he had set to work to discover some method of giving the eye the power of seeing through opaque bodies without the use of cumbersome apparatus; and he had succeeded in producing a serum—which he intended to call the Schwanthaler Serum—with which the eyes were to be inoculated, and thereby receive the power of seeing through non-transparent substances.

He had tried it on guinea pigs, and by close observation of their movements he had been led to believe that his serum was a success; nevertheless, there was still an element of uncertainty; a supreme experiment was necessary; it must be tried on the eye of a human being.

He had been in such a confused state of mind during the past week that he had neglected everything, even his *fiancée*—for the learned Doctor, who was not quite forty, had only lately become engaged. He could think of nothing but his experiments and the grand scientific discovery with which his name would for ever be associated.

The supreme experiment! Upon whom was it to be made? Think of the marvellous results which would be obtained were the serum proved to be all that he believed it to be. In surgery, the Röntgen Rays would be nowhere compared with the power given by the Schwanthaler Serum; while the latter would be of valuable assistance in scores of ways in which the former could be of no use.

Dr. Schwanthaler meditated at great length. He had devoted his life to science hitherto; why should he not go a step farther and inoculate his own eyes? Why should he not be the first to reap the benefits of his own labour? Yes, he would do it!

He took up the little syringe, filled it with the serum, adjusted the platinum needle, and walked to the window to have more light. Then he paused and reflected for a few seconds. It was not necessary to inoculate both eyes for the experiment. No! He would try one eye at a time; it should be the left eye.

He nerved himself for the ordeal, and boldly plunged the needle under the crystalline lens. It was all over! The eye had been inoculated. It was six o'clock in the evening, and he threw himself on the bed, closed his eyes and endeavoured to go to sleep. Overcome by the strain of work and excitement, he soon dropped off into an uneasy slumber.

When Dr. Schwanthaler awoke on the following morning he was conscious of a smarting pain in his left eye, and also a general drowsiness which he could not understand. He dressed himself mechanically, hardly knowing what he was doing; and when he had finished his toilette he sat down in a chair, buried his face in his hands and tried to think.

Just then there was a knock at the door and the landlady entered with his breakfast. The familiar sound of the landlady's voice acted upon him like a charm, as he himself would have expressed it; he remembered all as he sprang from his chair, shut his right eye and looked at her with the eye which he had inoculated with the serum on the previous evening.

Dr. Schwanthaler recoiled, partly with horror, partly with pleasure. Instead of the plump features of Mrs.

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Decker he beheld a skeleton head—or, rather, something like a skeleton head. All the bones were plainly visible, as were the brain and the other inner portions of the human head, while the eyes, twinkling in their bony sockets, had a transparent appearance which allowed him to see all the various parts, such as the retina. Mrs. Decker's arms and hands were also (apparently) devoid of their fleshy covering.

The *savant* clapped his hand to his left eye to shut out the sight, and looked at the woman with the untouched optic. He recognised the comely features and fat arms. There could be no doubt about it now; he had made a grand discovery which would be of incalculable benefit and immortalise his name.

He made a hasty breakfast, experimenting all the time by looking at his own hands. The result was not *quite* so satisfactory at he had anticipated; he had hoped to be able to see through all opaque substances, but he could only see through flesh. Nevertheless, he hoped to obtain better results later on.

After breakfast he dressed himself for his morning visit to the hospital. But he must first make a shade of some kind for his eye; it was confusing to see one thing with the right eye and another with the left, and he did not wish to see the interior arrangements of every person he met. At last he found an eyeglass, which he smeared over with some black substance; sticking this in his eye, he made his way to the hospital.

He was a well-known man, and the townspeople and students stared, as he passed with his eyeglass. But Dr. Schwanthaler paid no heed to the remarks which he overheard; he had a grand mission in life, and could afford to smile at such idle talk.

When the doctor arrived at the hospital, he found his colleagues, surrounded by students, in the midst of an operation. A poor fellow had been shot at by burglars; three bullets had entered his body, two of which had been extracted, but the third could not be found. The doctors had probed for it three times without success, and were just thinking of giving it up for that day, when Dr. Schwanthaler came on the scene. Simply as a matter of courtesy, he was asked if he could assist.

Taking his eyeglass from his left eye, he looked at the man and was able to locate the bullet without hesitation. Picking up the probe, he inserted it and the bullet was quickly extracted.

His colleagues were amazed; they were also envious. They had been trying hard to find the bullet and had been baffled; Dr. Schwanthaler had located it at once. It was too annoying.

The benefactor of mankind remained outwardly calm, although inwardly full of exultation. He soon took leave of his colleagues—he was anxious to get back to his laboratory. He took out his eyeglass to shade the left eye, but by some means he let it slip; it fell on the ground and broke into little pieces. He uttered an angry exclamation under his breath, but there was no help for it.

He tried to keep his left eye shut as he walked homewards, but it was useless; he could not resist the temptation of experimenting as he went along, in spite of the fact that it was in no way pleasant to see a smiling face with one eye, and an unrecognisable fleshless head with the other.

As he pursued his way it seemed to him that not only was the sight of the inoculated eye becoming stronger—so that he could see through other substances, but also that the untouched eye was becoming affected in like manner. In spite of his devotion to science, his desire to immortalise himself and confer an immense benefit on mankind, Dr. Schwanthaler's hair nearly stood on end at the prospect of possessing this extraordinary power with both eyes.

The landlady entered with his breakfast.

He could not wear darkened glasses over the two, that would be equivalent to blindness; yet it was not pleasant to think of passing the rest of his days in continual contemplation of the internal organisation of his fellow creatures and everything around him—never to be able to see things as they are.

Here were two people just in front of him. They had that moment met, and he saw two skulls approach and knock together. It was a kiss! He shuddered and turned away. He looked around. The trees had a transparent, leafless appearance, although it was summer; the walls of the houses were not opaque, he could see dimly through them; everything, in a word, was unnatural.

He rushed home and flung himself into a chair. He tore his hair and lamented the day when he decided to make the experiment; he flung the vial of serum far into the river which flowed at the end of the short garden; and he destroyed the syringe and the various preparations he had used, and then fell senseless.

A fortnight later, when he had sufficiently recovered from an attack of brain fever to be able to act sensibly, he found that he was quite blind in the left eye, and that the right eye was normal. And he heaved a sigh of relief that he was freed from that terrible power.

But he has abandoned his investigations and intends to keep secret the composition of his serum. So the world will never be enlightened on the subject of this great scientific discovery.

G. Day.

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THE DARK ROOM AT EDGELEIGH.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

CHAPTER I.

Miss Mardyn's Secret.

Mr. Pitcairn, tall, handsome and robust, dismounted at the gate and walked resolutely up the walk to the house.

On the verandah sat Miss Mardyn, the handsome housekeeper at Edgeleigh, reading a book, or pretending to do so; and now, as Mr. Pitcairn ascended the steps, the book was closed gently and laid upon her knee, and the lady looked up with a rather dreary smile.

You may see a very pretty face, and might go far to find a prettier; but is there not something just a little mysterious in the eyes and about the mouth—in the general expression, to tell the truth—something not absolutely repulsive, but cruel, perhaps, and even somewhat sly?

If anything of this, Mr. Pitcairn did not observe it. Stroking a grey moustache nervously, he threw himself into an oaken chair, and said:

"Avice, you see I am agitated, and yet you don't ask why. Are you afraid of me?"

Her smile became even more languid than before, and she answered.

"Why should I be? Yes, I see that you are a little agitated. No bad news, I trust?"

"Yes, bad news. Cyril Cuthbert is coming here this evening. I have a letter from him in my pocket. He comes to ask me for Mary's hand again, although he has already had my answer. Gentlemen did not use to do these things when I was younger."

And now Miss Mardyn really laughed—rather ironically, it is true; but sweetly also.

"Now, do you know, I rather suspect Mr. Cyril Cuthbert would elope with Miss Pitcairn if he thought there was no more honourable way to win her."

"Elope!"

"Lochinvar, he would call it, and perhaps view it quite as a joke altogether."

Mr. Pitcairn stood up and began pacing the verandah, brows knit and eyes flashing.

There was no more said.

Avice Mardyn descended to Mary Pitcairn, who was walking in the garden; and while they were yet talking among the flowers, who should come galloping up the avenue but Mr. Cuthbert himself.

He was a fine-looking fellow, brawny and muscular, dark and daring. Behind him rode a servant, for in those days no gentleman was without his valet.

And so Cyril dismounted, and came up to the ladies, hand out, smiling and frank.

"Here almost as soon as my letter, I'll wager! And how are we all? Never better, if one must judge by looks. Well, Miss Mardyn, you see I have not forgotten my promise—here is the book you asked me to bring."

He produced a small, shabbily bound volume from his breast-pocket.

Its title was: "The Philosophy of Dreams."

The housekeeper at first did not apparently recollect; but presently she said:

"Oh, yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Cuthbert; and now I shall know everything about——"

But he cautioned her with a look. To Mary's surprised glance he answered:

"Only the oddest little secret between Miss Mardyn and myself, which you shall know in good time. You would not think that Miss Mardyn is greviously and peculiarly afflicted, would you? And yet it is so." And then he took Miss Pitcairn's hand as if to dissipate any little jealousy she may have felt, and added tenderly: "We will explain all in good time, dear."

CHAPTER II.

Plans for Flight.

Presently Miss Mardyn, leaving the lovers together, returned with heightened colour to the verandah. Mr. Pitcairn was still sitting there, moody and bitter.

"Lochinvar has come," said the lady.

"But he will go away without his bride," answered the old man. "I have thought of a better way than turning him out of the house. No one was ever thrust from my door yet. I shall play a diplomatic game, and cry checkmate first."

Miss Mardyn was honestly puzzled.

"He will ask for my daughter's hand, and I shall refuse him. He will then attempt an elopement with her to-night. Do you know how I am to prevent that?"

"By strict surveillance."

"Precisely. She shall sleep in the Dark Room."

"The Dark Room!"

"No one has occupied it for years, Avice, as you know. My dressing-room forms the only means of entrance or escape, and we shall see now if Mr. Cyril Cuthbert will successfully play the *rôle* he contemplates. I shall confer at once with Mary, or will you give her the message, Avice?"

The Dark Room! thought Avice Mardyn. Truly enough, it had been unoccupied for years. It was said to be haunted—someone had committed suicide there.

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And how gloomy a place it was—aptly named! But one window, and the light kept from that by two great trees outside, swaying and creaking in the windy nights.

At this point Cyril Cuthbert and Miss Pitcairn approached.

The young man was greeted coldly by the master of the house; but he took it not amiss.

Avice drew Mary into the long, dim hall.

She told her there Mr. Pitcairn's orders.

The young lady, pallid and frightened, heard attentively. Hands clasped and eyes upraised into the somewhat cruel face of the housekeeper, what were her thoughts?

Meanwhile frank and direct young Cuthbert lost no time in coming to the point with the master of Edgeleigh. Despite his entreaties, the old man was inexorable.

"Well, be it so," said Cuthbert finally. "In time you may learn to know me better and to regret this—this injustice."

And so they turned, a little constrainedly, to other topics. Cuthbert had evidently made up his mind. All that he now desired was to see Miss Pitcairn for five minutes alone.

She returned, and then he thought he detected something else—this interview could not be had.

Miss Mardyn was resolutely in the way. By whose direction? It needed no ghost to come out of the grave to answer that.

For the first time he found out what Mary Pitcairn had known from the first—that this woman was not his friend, and in business of this sort he wanted her as his friend—she was to be his enemy. A great many things just now recurred to him, and he could fit together what might otherwise have been a puzzle very well.

Miss Mardyn was, as we know, very handsome, and she was also accomplished, clever, and a woman of the world. Now, it is not safe to slight a woman like this, especially if she is as unscrupulous as comely; and so Cuthbert felt at length what it was beginning to cost him to have preferred so boldly another, younger, and by many degrees less gifted in certain senses.

However, he accepted the situation resignedly. He thought that he held a trump card.

Avice Mardyn, in a weak moment, when they first became acquainted, had confided to him a secret. It could not be dishonourable to use his knowledge for a purpose of his own now; for is not all fair in love? And he suspected something also—Miss Mardyn would not object to be mistress of Edgeleigh.

Luckily Mr. Pitcairn soon left the verandah for his study. Cyril sauntered over to the housekeeper, who was pensively contemplating the just rising evening star.

"We are playing chaperon to-night, are we not?"

She turned, her face for an instant flushed.

"Do you think so?"

"I know so. Mr. Pitcairn has directed you to prevent any private word between Mary and myself. I used to believe you were too good a friend of mine to league against me."

"You forget that duty is a higher claim than even friendship," said the lady, perhaps with faint sarcasm.

"Well, let us understand each other. Your duties, my dear Miss Mardyn, would quickly end here, I fancy, if my good friend Pitcairn knew that you had once upon a time taken a human life—your husband's."

She laid her hand upon his arm quickly, and her breathing was quick and fast.

"You will not betray me, Cyril?"

"Betray? Nonsense! I learned part of your secret by accident; the remainder you told me of your own free will. A short time ago, while stopping here at Edgeleigh, I happened, while enjoying a quiet midnight pipe upon the lawn, to meet a lady walking in her sleep. I awoke her, and found her to be Miss Avice Mardyn. She, the next day, while suffering from the reaction of opium, which she used habitually, though in secret, confided to me that she had once been known elsewhere as Mrs. Powys, and in a somnambulic trance had involunarily stabbed her husband. Nothing incredible in all that; but a useful thing to know, as I find now. I am very well aware, in addition, that you still use opium."

"Cyril, mercy!" she whispered.

Mary Pitcairn sat some distance from them, perhaps wondering at Cyril's want of gallantry, but she could hear nothing of this dialogue.

"Mercy, on condition that you give me ten minutes' speech alone with the young lady at the other end of the verandah."

"Yes, yes! But for my sake—and yours, too—no more than ten minutes."

Cyril gave Mary his arm, and they descended into the grounds.

There is a beautiful grove just to the right of Edgeleigh and thither they went.

An oak, long since shivered by lightning, gave them a seat, and here, Mary's hand in his, Cyril laid his plan.

"Darling, you must leave this place with me to-night. I have brought both my horses, and they must have fleet steeds who follow," quoth this young Lochinvar.

"But it is impossible, Cyril. I am to sleep in that dreadful Dark Room. Papa's dressing-chamber is the only means of entrance or exit."

Cyril laughed lightly.

"Do you forget who once lived here, sweet? My mad uncle, Byron Cuthbert—as great a rake as his namesake. The Dark Room is an enigma of which your father's dressing-room is not the only key."

"What do you mean, Cyril?"

"Only this—that there is a secret door to the Dark Room, by which to-night I mean to enter and carry you off. You remember the portrait of Miss Eleanor Digby at the right of the bed?"

"Yes; with the falcon on her finger, and in that stiff, high-necked dress."

"There are nine gilt circles in the frame, apparently ornaments; but one of these is useful likewise. The secret door can only be opened from the other side; but by pressing the upper part of this gilt circle—the fifth from the bottom—it will divide and form a sort of bolt. In that case the door cannot be opened at all."

"Oh, how strange, Cyril!"

"There is a staircase hidden—I will not tell you just now where," he added in a low voice, glancing round. "But when you retire to your room, dress for your flight, darling. I shall come, be assured; and do not fail in being ready."

"Oh, Cyril, I am so afraid!"

"Nonsense! To-morrow you will laugh at fear. We shall then be safely married, you know, and I've no doubt but we shall see penitent papa riding up to my gate—our gate—soon afterwards; and then, you know, reconciliation and the fatted calf and the champagne, and all the rest of it, eh?—over the return of the prodigal parent."

"What time will you come to-night, Cyril?"

"At twelve," he said.

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CHAPTER III.

The Figure Emerges from the Secret Door.

In front of the mirror over the bureau in the Dark Room stood Mary Pitcairn, dressing for contemplated flight that night with Cyril Cuthbert. Two tall candlesticks and the candles lighted gave dismal light at either hand.

No wonder the place was called by its gloomy name, for it was truly gruesome and murky as a hermit's cave.

Miss Pitcairn every now and then paused in her silent labours to glance at the door at the far end of the chamber, or to steal a peep at the portrait of Mistress Eleanor Digby, with her falcon on her prim finger, from behind whom we know what apparition was soon expected to step forth.

By that tiny watch lying on the bureau, and ticking away so cheerfully, we see that it is nearly half-past eleven o'clock. The wind is moaning outside; for, winter or summer, it always moans here; and the two great trees are wagging their gigantic heads at the window, and seemingly trying to peer in; but with this one exception there is a mournful silence.

Pallid and nervous, Miss Pitcairn continued her preparations. Just as she gave the last touch to her hat, she was startled by the turning of the knob of the door that led from her father's dressing-room.

The next instant Mr. Pitcairn was in the room.

There was something so dreadful in his countenance that the girl was frozen with terror where she stood. He was in his shirt sleeves. In his hand he held a revolver.

His lips were white and shrunken, like those of a man in mortal sickness, and his eyes were bloodshot; but he looked like a fiend. He had taken off his shoes, and was in his stockings, and now he walked over and sat down.

Mary Pitcairn recovered something of her strength, and threw herself at his feet.

"Papa, what is the matter?" she cried wildly. "What are you going to do? Why don't you speak to me—to your own Mary who loves you, papa? How you terrify me when you stare so! What have I done—only tell me what I have done, papa?"

"You were overheard to-night," he said huskily. "I know all. You are dressed, I perceive; but you will not leave Edgeleigh as soon as you anticipate."

"Oh, forgive me, darling papa! Indeed, he loves me—and—and—you would not consent to our marriage—and all this is my fault—indeed it is. He is not to blame."

"Not to blame? Humph! Wait."

He still kept his eyes fixed upon the portrait, the pistol grasped in his firm hand.

"Oh, papa, what are you going to do? I never saw you look so before," wept the poor girl distractedly. "You will not injure him. Punish me. It is I alone who deserve your anger, papa. I swear it is not his fault."

"Avice Mardyn overheard everything. She found out the entrance to the hidden staircase. Clever Avice!" he laughed horribly. "I shall marry her for this, and make her mistress of this place."

But in uttering these words he did not once glance at the child kneeling before him. It was a kind of soliloquy. He stared steadfastly at the picture.

"Oh, papa, you mean to do something dreadful. I see it in your face. You mean to kill him! But you have no right—you have no right. He has done nothing as yet—nothing at all. It will be murder!"

"I have the right to kill the man who enters my daughter's room secretly at midnight, and, by the Heaven above us, I mean to use it!"

Her hysterical pleading was like the despair of the Last Day. But she spoke to marble. Perhaps he pitied her—it would be hard to believe otherwise—but his purpose was inexorable.

And now she stood up, her hands crossed upon her distracted head. What could be done? A thought flashed upon her—the fifth gilt circle from the bottom! If she could press this unobserved her lover was saved.

"I don't believe there is a secret door," she suddenly broke out, in a changed tone. "This is some dull jest to frighten me. You, papa, and Cyril, have laid this plot, but I am not to be so deceived."

She went over to the portrait and began to beat against it with her small hand. "It is solid—it is," she said. "I knew there was no door. A pretty thing that none of us should ever have heard of it before to-night! Listen to that—solid as masonry. And see this frame, too; it can't be moved the eighth of an inch."

All the while her eyes were counting the gilt circles from the bottom. She came to the fifth. Her fingers pounces upon it in a second, and she was about to press the upper part. At the same moment another hand—her father's—writhed across her shoulder and clasped her own.

"Let that be. Sit down in that chair," he said, pointing to a crimson Pompadour by the bureau.

There was something awful in his tone—so terrible that she yielded at once. But she knew that all was over now. The hands of the watch wanted three minutes to twelve. She hid her face in her hands, but had not even the relief of tears.

Pitcairn went over to the chest of drawers and blew out the candles. A soft ray of moonlight stole in at the window, sufficient to illuminate the portrait.

He crossed back again to his seat, and held the pistol upon his knee.

In another minute there was a light step. With a creak and a groan something was pushed aside. A draft of cold and musty air blew into the room. A figure emerged from the shadow into the moonlight.

There was a shot and a scream.

Pitcairn cried, "Good God!" and he hastily relighted the candles. The atmosphere was heavy with the smell of powder and smoke.

He went over to the body on the floor, and found he had shot and killed Avice Mardyn, walking in her sleep.

Through the secret doorway Cyril Cuthbert, top-booted and hat on head, ready for riding, now appeared.

"You have murdered her for me, Mr. Pitcairn," he said quietly; and then in a few words he told of the dead woman's secret habit—opium eating—and how she sometimes wandered about in trances produced by the drug.

Pitcairn stared like a man who had lost his senses. Presently he began groping about the room, and muttering incoherently to himself. He left the chamber and shut himself up elsewhere, and nothing more was seen of him that night.

Next day he was taken ill. He lingered for many weeks in a state of delirium; but one evening, about sunset, all his faculties returned to him. He called Mary Pitcairn and her lover to his bedside, and gave them his blessing; and then, with a sigh, he closed his eyes and was no more.

Horace Adler.

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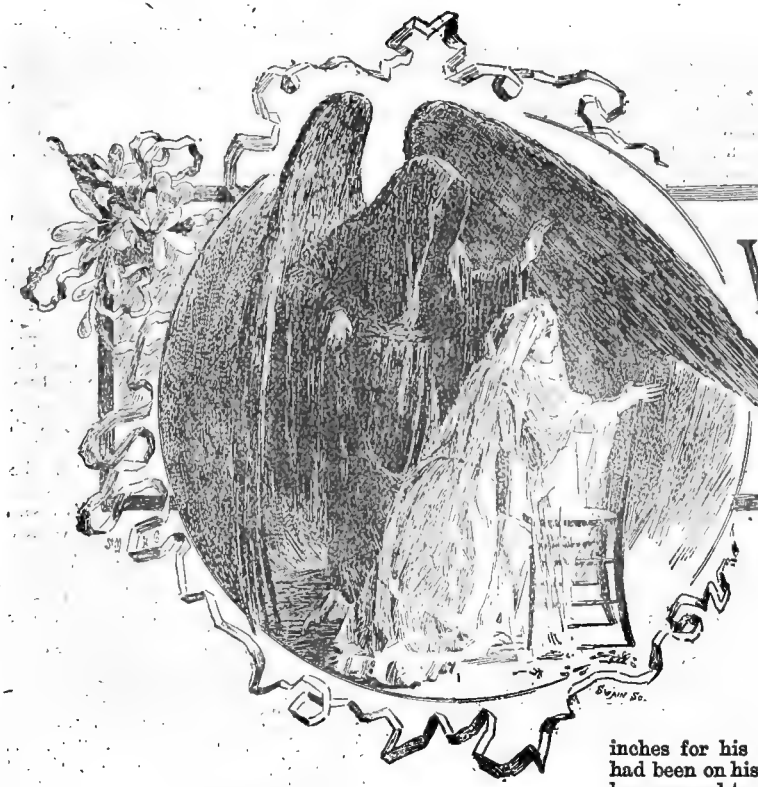

THE WYTHECOMBE MYSTERY:

A ROMANCE.

By J. K. Leys.

Illustrated by S. Mar. Fitz-Gerald.

CHAPTER I.

'Twixt Life and Death.

"Can I risk it?"

The young man lay on the edge of the cliff and peered down. Nine or ten feet below him was a narrow ledge, covered with short grass, perhaps two feet wide. Towards his left, that is, to the north-west, the ledge continued till it reached the corner of the cliff. The sun had set, and the clouds opposite were already glowing in gorgeous colours—gold, and amber, and crimson—but it seemed as if that part of the horizon which was invisible, hidden by the projection of the hill on the left, must be even more glorious than the part that could be seen. The young fellow lying on the edge of the cliff was an artist; his sketching materials lay on the ground at his side; he had climbed far up the hill in the hope of being able to catch the sunset at its finest; and it was intolerable to him that he should after all miss the best part of the magnificent spectacle.

"Can I risk it?" he said to himself again. "I think I might. The ledge seems broad enough. Once down there I could make my way to the corner easily enough. But the getting up again? Ah! I have it!"

Rising to his feet, he quickly undid a leather strap which was round his portfolio, and passed it round the trunk of a small mountain-ash that grew near the edge of the precipice. Then, without giving himself time to think—for Launcelot Vere was painfully aware that his nerves were not the steadiest in the world—he grasped the free end of the strap in his left hand, and let the lower half of his body slide over the edge. Lower still he descended, supporting himself by his elbows. Down—down still—lower yet—till he was hanging by his fingers.

Then he dropped.

A cry of agony pierced the air.

The outer edge of the grassy surface had broken away under the weight of his left foot, leaving less than twelve inches for his support; but the chief part of his weight had been on his right foot, and, with one desperate struggle, he managed to get his left knee on the narrow shelf, and clinging convulsively to the breast of the rock he drew up his left foot, and stood upright.

Vere was a slightly built man, not particularly robust, and untrained in gymnastics. For him to have done even what he had done under any less pressure than the prospect of instant death, would have been a sheer impossibility.

After pausing a moment to recover his breath, he let his eyes wander over the rocky wall in search of the strap. It was hanging, as he knew it must be, within easy distance of his left hand; and he speedily grasped it.

Then he looked slowly around to see whether there was any better way of escape than scrambling up the few feet of rock in front of him. It soon became evident that there was not only no better way, but no other way whatever. Below there was only the naked precipice, he knew that. To right and left the broken ledge was not merely narrow and sloping, but manifestly unsound. He must climb up. It was not a great distance. The rock was rough enough to afford him some foothold, and, above all, he had the strap.

He grasped it as high up as he could, and gave it a hard pull.

To his horror it came away in his hand!

One moment he stood speechless, absolutely dumb with terror. The next, a cry to heaven for mercy went up from the hill, then a wild scream for help.

Help? How could help come to him on that lonely Welsh hillside? But he would not think it impossible, for it was his only chance. Death now stared him in the face. Already the constrained position he was standing in made him feel cramped and sore. To stay there till morning would be impossible. To move to right or left was equally impossible. Again and again his shouts rang out. Oh, how weak, how pitifully weak they sounded in that solitude! The grim rock above him shut in his cries, making it almost absurd to hope that they could be heard.

There was no answering cry. He hardly expected that there should be; and yet he strained his ears to listen time

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after time. The minutes seemed hours, and he fancied it was already getting dark. A feeling like despair came over the poor fellow; he shouted more madly than before, and then, putting his fingers to his lips, he whistled, schoolboy fashion, sending the shrill notes far along the side of the mountain, much farther than his voice could reach.

The mere effort to do this seemed to relieve his faculties. Another thing, he managed to ease his toes away from the rock a little without allowing his heels to project over the abyss; and the relief to the muscles of his back and legs was considerable. He put his arm on the rock, leant his face on it, and tried to think.

No; there was nothing he could think of—nothing he could do. He must husband his breath, and shout at intervals as loud as he could, on the chance that some shepherd coming down the hill might hear him. For the rest, he must hold on to that narrow shelf of ground, from which, every now and then, he heard a morsel crumble off and fall away down—down—with a sickening rattle far away below. "God grant," he said to himself, "that I may not go mad before the end comes."

Slowly the light faded out of the west, the gorgeous hues turning to pale yellow, green, and grey. The foliage of the rowan-tree which he could just see overhead became more and more indistinct. Launcelot was conscious that his strength was going fast. The strain was so frightful that he felt as if merely to sit down and rest on the shelf he stood on, knowing that he could never recover his upright position, would be a relief so sweet that it was worth his life to have it.

His limbs were beginning to tremble, when he suddenly started, and bent his head to one side. He was not deceived.

Faint and clear, like a bell of a mountain goat, came a voice from above:

"Where are you?"

"Here! Here! For God's sake come! Come quickly. My strength is failing."

A minute of silence, and again he called out. A third time he cried in his agony: "Come! For God's sake come quick."

And the voice answered: "I am coming as fast as I can."

The cramp was almost unendurable; but the poor fellow waited in silence—waited for what seemed at least half-an-hour (in reality not five minutes)—and then the voice hailed him once more. This time it was directly over his head.

"Are you down there? I can't see—— Oh, good gracious, yes!"

Vere was there, clinging like a fly to the face of the cliff; and above him there peered over the edge a girl's head. He could hardly distinguish it in the darkness from a man's; but he knew by the voice that it was certainly a woman who was looking down at him.

Then—

"How on earth did you get down there?"

"Easily enough. The question is how I can get up again. I am standing on a ledge of rock so narrow that I can barely keep my footing. If you can't help me I must perish."

"I will run and bring someone to help you," cried the girl; and the head was suddenly withdrawn.

"No! No! No! For God's sake stay where you are. You never could find the place again in the dark; and long before you could get back from the village I shall have dropped over. The cramps are already more than I can bear."

"But what can I do? I can't reach you."

"No; and if you could it would be of no use. I should only pull you over. Haven't you got a cord of any kind about you?"

"A cord? No!"

"Or anything of which a cord might be made?"

"No! Oh, I wish I could help you. I wish I could help you. It is dreadful!"

"There is a strap here. The buckle gave way, or I should have been able to climb up. If I could pass it up to you—but that is impossible."

"Do let me go for help."

"It is of no use—not the least. I tell you it would be all over long before you could get back."

A silence.

"Wait!" cried the girl suddenly. "Don't lose hope. I have thought of something. Just wait one minute."

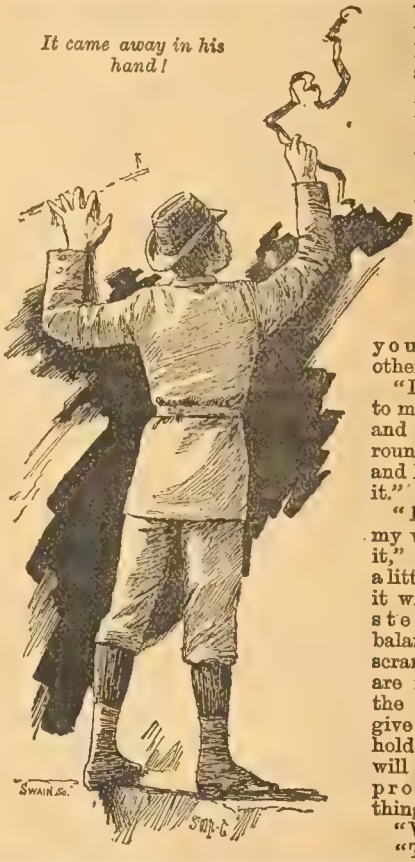
A white arm waved for an instant, and vanished.

Vere set his teeth, and began to count, that the seconds might seem to pass more rapidly.

Three minutes passed, and the sweet, clear voice was heard once more.

"Look—I am letting something down to you!"

And the next instant Vere found his head swept by some thick, soft, woollen stuff. He brushed it aside, and grasped it with one hand.



It came away in his hand!

"What is this?"

"It is the skirt of my dress. I have ripped it open. It is of tweed, and very strong."

"How have you secured the other end?"

"I have doubled it to make it stronger, and put one end round this little tree, and I am sitting on it."

"I shall not trust my whole weight to it," said Vere after a little pause. "But it will be enough to steady me and balance me as I scramble up. There are rough places on the rocks that will give me a little foothold. One spring will do it. Only promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"That the moment you feel the cloth slipping from under you, you will roll off on the grass, and not attempt to hold it."

No answer.

"Do you promise?"

"I can't promise that. If it slips I shall press on it more heavily."

"Then I won't come up at all."

"But that is madness!"

"I don't care. I won't endanger your life as well as my own."

"Yes; I promise."

"Here goes, then! Sit tight!"

Vere clutched the thick folds of the tweed with one hand, bent down as low as he dared, then sprang upwards—missed grasping the top of the cliff with his right, as he had hoped to do, but caught the cloth instead, swung half round, and for one dread moment his whole weight was on the dress. But it did not tear; and the next instant his toe caught in a slight projection of the rock and relieved

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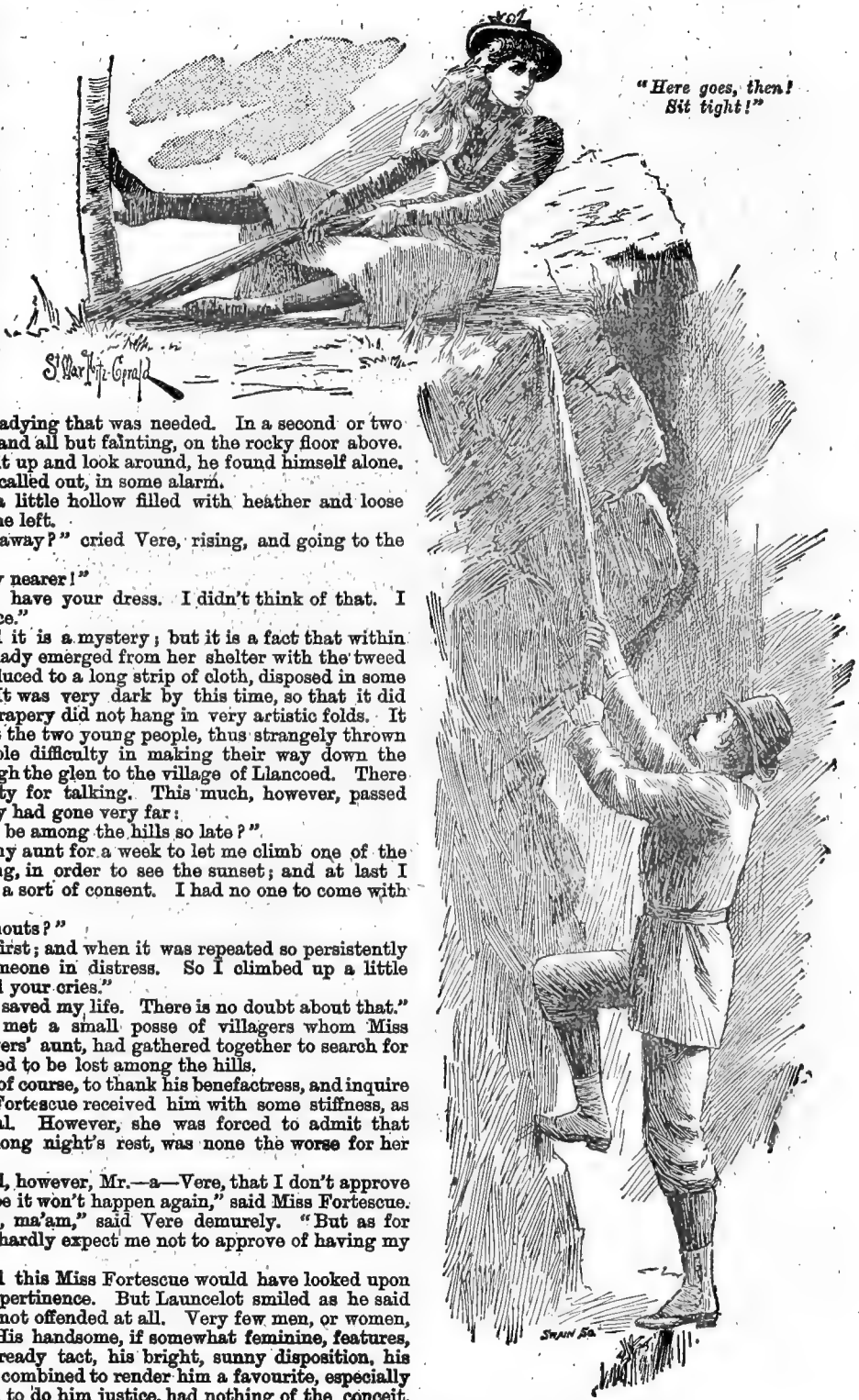
the strain. Then, working his way upwards inch by inch, he managed to get the fingers of his right hand hooked over the edge of the rock.

Now his knees grasped the cloth, and his left hand slid up a little way; then his right elbow got on the top; and so, straining and panting, he reached the summit. The moment it was practicable he let go the tweed and trusted to his elbows. It would have fared badly with him then, had not two strong girl's hands caught him by one shoulder. That gave him just the balance and steadying that was needed. In a second or two he was lying breathless, and all but fainting, on the rocky floor above.



"Here goes, then! Sit tight!"

When he was able to sit up and look around, he found himself alone.

"Where are you?" he called out, in some alarm.

An answer came from a little hollow filled with heather and loose boulders a few paces to the left.

"Why have you run away?" cried Vere, rising, and going to the spot.

"Please don't come any nearer!"

"Oh, you mean that I have your dress. I didn't think of that. I will bring it to you at once."

How she accomplished it is a mystery; but it is a fact that within five minutes that young lady emerged from her shelter with the tweed skirt, which had been reduced to a long strip of cloth, disposed in some way about her person. It was very dark by this time, so that it did not matter much if the drapery did not hang in very artistic folds. It was so dark, in fact, that the two young people, thus strangely thrown together, had considerable difficulty in making their way down the rough hillside, and through the glen to the village of Llancoed. There was but little opportunity for talking. This much, however, passed between them before they had gone very far:

"How did you come to be among the hills so late?"

"I have been teasing my aunt for a week to let me climb one of the lower hills in the evening, in order to see the sunset; and at last I worried her into giving a sort of consent. I had no one to come with me, so I came alone."

"And you heard my shouts?"

"I heard you whistle first; and when it was repeated so persistently I thought it might be someone in distress. So I climbed up a little further, and then I heard your cries."

"God bless you! You saved my life. There is no doubt about that."

At Llancoed the pair met a small posse of villagers whom Miss Fortescue, Winnie Denvers' aunt, had gathered together to search for the girl, who was supposed to be lost among the hills.

Next day Vere called, of course, to thank his benefactress, and inquire after her health. Miss Fortescue received him with some stiffness, as was perhaps but natural. However, she was forced to admit that Winnie, having had a long night's rest, was none the worse for her adventure.

"You must understand, however, Mr.—a—Vere, that I don't approve of such things, and I hope it won't happen again," said Miss Fortescue.

"I sincerely hope not, ma'am," said Vere demurely. "But as for approving of it, you can hardly expect me not to approve of having my life saved."

If anyone else had said this Miss Fortescue would have looked upon it as a piece of great impertinence. But Launcelot smiled as he said it, and the old lady was not offended at all. Very few men, or women, could resist his smile. His handsome, if somewhat feminine, features, his fine dark eyes, his ready tact, his bright, sunny disposition, his careless unselfishness, all combined to render him a favourite, especially with women. And Vere, to do him justice, had nothing of the conceit, the self-complacent priggishness of a lady's man. He seemed utterly unconscious of their regard for him.

Before he left the house that morning, he had gained the right of calling again; and he quickly availed himself of the privilege.

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Of course, under the circumstances, Launcelot could not do less than fall in love with his preserver; but it is only fair to add that he could hardly have helped falling in love with her under whatever circumstances he had met her. Winnie was a trifle under the middle height, fair, bright-eyed, and decidedly pretty. If her mouth was a shade too wide, if there was here and there a suspicion of freckles on her white forehead, Vere never noticed these slight blemishes, or he considered them to be additional charms.

The courtship proceeded with marvellous celerity; Miss Fortescue took the alarm, but just too late, and by the time Winnie's visit was at an end, the fateful words had been spoken, and she was in a state of palpitating, strange, delightful, semi-delirium.

"I shall be very anxious until I hear how your father takes it," said Vere in a graver tone than usual, as he leant on the window of the railway-carriage which was to carry his love off to her home in Devonshire.

"Papa will be quite pleased when he understands how happy I am," answered Winnie with a blush.

Vere did not feel so sure. A country rector with some hundreds a year of his own and a good living—Mr. Denvers was rector of Wythecombe—likes to know who he is giving his daughter to; and Launcelot Vere had nothing in the world beyond a half-formed reputation as a clever artist, both in landscape and portraiture. It was characteristic of him that he gratefully accepted the girl's offer to break the news of the engagement to her father. "I can always manage papa," said Winnie with some pride; so Vere stayed his hand, and the intended letter was not written.

"Why have you run away?" cried Vere.

But the Reverend Mark Denvers fairly took his daughter by surprise. He first pooh-poohed the whole wonderful story. "What, my dear? A strolling artist? Pooh, nonsense, my love. You ought to have more self-respect than hint at such things, even in jest."

Winnie was distressed, mortified, bewildered. But she persevered in saying that it was quite true; and presently a letter came from Vere which proved to the Rector that something serious was contemplated. Of course he peremptorily forbade the whole thing, but that did no good. The lovers continued to correspond; they had no intention of giving one another up; and the Rector was secretly unhappy. Then a speaking likeness—really a charming picture—of his daughter arrived from London, and being timidly presented to the Rector by Winnie, went far to soften his heart. At length Mr. Denvers gave way. He caught up his sad-faced little girl one day, kissed her, and told her she might send for that wonderful lover of hers whenever she pleased.

Vere came down, and submitted to inspection, and the Rector was forced to admit that he was a gentleman, and a very pleasant person to talk to. After that, his opposition was but half-hearted; and, finally, it was arranged that the wedding should take place in the following September.

In August Launcelot paid a second visit to Wythecombe Rectory, and stayed for some days, during which all the details were settled. The young couple were not to take a house at first, but live in furnished rooms (and save money) for the first six months, and the Rector promised to help with the furnishing later on. The bridesmaids were chosen, one of them being Winnie's bosom friend, Katharine Dale. Katharine lived with her widowed mother in a small house not far from the Rectory.

Launcelot had one friend in that part of the country, a man called Harold Kenyon, the manager of a branch bank at Darnport, a small seaport town about three miles from Wythecombe. Kenyon was one of Vere's oldest and most intimate acquaintances, and he readily promised to act the part of best man.

But amid all the pleasant fuss and bustle of the coming marriage, there was an uneasy consciousness among the Rector's daughters—Mrs. Denvers had been dead for some years—that their father did not really approve of the match. The fact was, that he had wished Winnie to marry some local squire, a substantial, genial soul, with no nonsense of cosmopolitan culture or feminine refinement about him—some man who would live quietly at home from Yule to Christmas, and never want to take his wife anywhere outside the county boundaries.

Vere was in many respects the antipodes of the ideal husband he had thought out for Winnie. He had consented to the marriage because he could not have his pretty daughter going about the house like a ghost; but he yielded to her entreaties with a distinctly bad grace, with many a half-smothered growl, and with an irrepressible inward misgiving as to the result of such a union.

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CHAPTER II.

A Strange Disappearance.

There was a pleasant stir about the pretty Devonshire village on Winnie Denvers' wedding morning. Groups of women assembled on the Green to discuss the event in all its bearings; many of the farmers had given their men a holiday, and the two public-houses were well filled. By eleven the church was crowded.

Just as the clock in the weather-beaten stone tower overhead struck the hour, the vestry door was flung open, and the bride came into the church leaning on her father's arm. Everybody turned and craned out his or her neck to get a good look at her. And indeed the sight was one worth looking at—the slender, fairy-like figure all in white, her yellow hair glinting through the cloudy lace veil that covered it, while her father, a portly, well-preserved man of sixty, stalked along by her side.

After them came four bridesmaids.

A heavy frown came over the Rector's face as he surveyed the people sitting near the chancel steps. The bridegroom was not there.

"Where is Launcelot?" he said to his daughter in an angry whisper, as if she were already responsible for the sins and shortcomings of her future husband. Then, recognising the absurdity of blaming his daughter, he added: "Bad taste to keep you waiting even for a second, my darling."

"He will be here immediately, I am sure, papa," whispered the bride in reply. "Perhaps the church clock is a little fast."

Now, any expression cast on the accuracy of the church clock was like smoke in the Rector's nostrils; but he made no reply. Only, he shut his lips tight, wheeled round to the altar, and contemplated with magisterial severity an angel flying heavenwards, as depicted in the east window.

Meantime the tiny hand that lay on his arm trembled a little. But Winnie did not look round. She was at once too proud to seem anxious for her bridegroom's coming, and too shy to face the crowd of curious eyes. Her gaze was fixed on the marble pavement at her feet. But her ears were on the stretch, listening with all their might for the well-known step.

Still she heard it not.

The vestry door moved. It was slowly opened, and the Rector threw a quick glance towards it. But he was speedily undeceived. Instead of the pale, delicate, refined countenance he hoped to see, he beheld a cloud of billowy white, and above it a red face terminating in a pink cranium, which was bounded on either side by a hedge of stubbly white hair. This was Canon Drake, the Rector's chief friend and ally, who had come to perform the marriage rite.

The Rector shuffled uneasily, shook his head, and finally frowned in so fierce a manner, that the Reverend Gabriel Drake precipitately retreated. The vestry door closed after him with a bang.

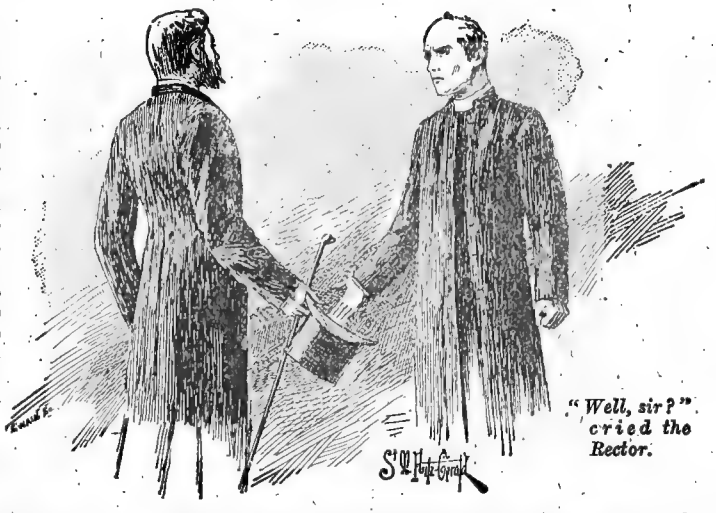
Then swiftly, without a word of warning, the Rector walked up to the vestry door, carrying his daughter with him, and followed by four blushing and wondering bridesmaids.

One by one the little party passed through the narrow door and disappeared.

Everybody in the church stared at his neighbour. Some of the spectators looked concerned; but most of them were grinning. Here and there one could hear a titter.

Hardly had the vestry door closed behind the last of the bridesmaids, when the Rector's wrath burst forth like a fiery torrent.

"Monstrous! Intolerable! The puppy! The—hem!—the insolent puppy! To dare to treat my daughter in this way! But I wash my hands of him. Never shall that fellow be son-in-law of mine!"



"Well, sir?" cried the Rector.

"My dear Denvers," put in the Canon, "consider. The poor fellow may have been taken ill suddenly; or he may have got into a wrong train; or there may have been some delay on the line. A thousand things may have happened which he could neither foresee nor prevent."

But this attempt to quell the storm only made the Rector more angry. He turned on the red-faced clergyman as if *he* had been the cause of Launcelot Vere's unaccountable behaviour.

"Sir!" cried his reverence, "I say a man ought to be at the altar at the hour named, *whatever* may happen."

"Even if he happened to die?" retorted the Canon with a smile. The next moment he repented his ill-timed jest. The bride, who had overheard him, turned white to the lips, and all but fainted. Two of the bridesmaids rushed out to seek for a glass of water. The other two supported her in their arms.

"I am better now. It was very foolish of me," she said with a faint smile.

"Come home, my darling," said the Rector tenderly. "It is long past the hour——"

He stopped, for the door leading to the churchyard had been hastily opened, and a young man in correct wedding attire, but with an anxious troubled expression on his face, burst into the room. They all knew him. It was Harold Kenyon, the best man, a special friend, as we know, of the missing bridegroom.

"Well, sir?" cried the Rector, turning on him fiercely.

"I have been to the station," panted the young man, for he was breathless with running. "He didn't come by the last train, and the train wasn't late. And I have been to the post-office. No telegram has come. I can't understand it."

"Neither can I," said the clergyman coldly, as he offered his arm to the bride. She rose and took it. "Come, girls," he said to the bridesmaids. "You may tell your friend," he added to Kenyon, "that he need not trouble to come again to the Rectory. If he does, the door will be shut in his face."

Winnie, hearing this, fairly burst out crying; and the bridal party set out for the Rectory, which lay just beyond the churchyard. Kenyon threw an imploring look at the last of the four bridesmaids, a tall girl with pale beautiful features, and a coronet of black hair coiled on the top of her head. This was Katharine Dale. She felt that he was looking at her and blushed slightly. Then, just as she passed him, she met his gaze.

"May I speak with you?" he said in a low tone. In reply she glanced in the direction of the Rectory, and nodded. Kenyon understood her to mean that he would have an opportunity of seeing her as she left the house, and he

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Sat down on a flat tombstone.

walked on towards the other end of the churchyard, where a wicket gate gave access to the Rectory garden.

As he passed the church porch he paused to allow a stream of people who were leaving the church to pass him. The children, released from their long waiting, were rushing noisily about.

"Where's the schulemistress? Why don't she keep the young uns in better order?" asked somebody.

"She's gone away!" cried one of the boys gleefully.

"Where's she gone?" asked one of the crowd.

"I dunno. Nobody's seed ur sin the day afore yest'day," answered the urchin, scudding off across the flat gravestones.

"Sarves th' parson's lass right, takin' up wi' a middlewit like thicky Vere; they say he's only a painter man," said one of the lads.

"He's a proper ape, makin' a vule o' her afore all the parish," chimed in his sweetheart.

Harold walked on to avoid hearing more. It was not surprising that these simple-minded folks should resent the slight cast on their parson's daughter; nor was it to be wondered at that they set down the pale Londoner, with his delicate artist's face, as an effeminate good-for-nothing. But it pained him to hear such talk, when, for all he knew, his poor friend might be stark and dead. He knew Launcelot Vere well; for years they had chummed together in London lodgings; and Kenyon thought he could have sworn that nothing but death or mortal sickness could have kept him away from Wythecombe that day.

Soon Harold reached a secluded part of the churchyard, from which he could observe the gate through which Katharine Dale, the girl he wished to see, must pass, and sat down on a flat tombstone.

He had not long to wait.

He heard the latch of the little gate click, and his heart beat painfully, beat so that for the instant he could not have spoken.

A sad smile was on the girl's face as she approached.

"You wanted to see me?" she said gently.

"Yes. I want some one to tell Miss Denvers that I am *certain* it is not Vere's fault that he is not here. I would stake my life on it."

"But you have only your own belief to offer; you have no evidence."

"True, I have no evidence; but I know Launcelot Vere as well as I know myself. He is weak in some respects, but he is incapable of staying away deliberately. Something must have happened to him. He may have been run over in the street, for example, and taken to a hospital."

"It would not comfort Miss Denvers much to suggest that to her," said Kate.

Her companion scarcely heard her. His eyes were fixed on a lad who was coming up the lane, whistling—a lad with a brown envelope in his hand.

Harold rushed up to the boy and snatched the telegram from him. Kate, watching his face as he read the message, saw it suddenly change. It grew pale, then hard and stern.

"It is not from Vere," he said abruptly. "It is from a friend to whom I wired this morning, begging him to call at Vere's rooms and make inquiries. This what he says—

"'Called at Vere's. He has not been at his rooms since Tuesday afternoon. Left no message. Shall I inform police?'"

"This is very strange," murmured Miss Dale. The young man was staring at her with his clear, brown eyes, but she did not feel offended, nor did she shrink from his gaze as she had done lately. She saw that he was not thinking of her at that moment.

"Miss Dale," he said in a voice that was hoarse with excitement, but perfectly firm, "either poor Launcelot is dead, or has met with an accident or foul play of some kind. I am going to look for him, and I shall look till I find him. I shall start for London at once, and you will tell Miss Denvers that——"

"Don't let me interrupt your conversation," said a voice close by. The speaker's steps had not been audible on the thick turf of the grassy lane. Katharine blushed furiously, but did not look round just at once. Harold, looking up, saw a good-looking man, just over the middle height, physically strong, dressed in correct morning costume—a man with a sallow complexion, fine dark eyes, hair, whiskers, and moustache all cut short, no beard. A *pince-nez* dangled from his waistcoat button. His age might have been anything between thirty and forty. His air was quiet, pleasant, distinctly that of a gentleman.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Shenstone?" said Harold rather stiffly.

The new-comer returned the salutation rather more cordially, lifted his hat with a smile to Miss Dale, and held the hand she offered him a second or two longer than was necessary. This was only natural, as the two were engaged to be married.

"We were speaking about Mr. Vere's strange absence," said Kate. She spoke to her *fiancé*, but kept her eyes fixed on Kenyon's face. "Mr. Kenyon thinks something must have happened to him, as he has not been heard of at his rooms for the last two days."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes. Mr. Kenyon has just had a telegram. He is going up to London to make inquiries."

"Oh, indeed—yes. Of course, some of Mr. Vere's friends ought to make inquiries."

"He has no relations—none in this country, at all events; and I believe no nearer friend than I."

"Yes; you would be the very person. But won't you find it difficult to get away from the bank? If you like——"

At this moment a housemaid came running down the garden-path with a message for Miss Dale. "Miss Winifred," she said, "was in a very sad way, and would Miss Dale go back and sit with her a bit?"

She turned at once to go, her lover walking as far as the garden gate by her side.

Kenyon waited for him to return.

"You were going to say something," he said when Shenstone came back.

"Yes; I was going to say that if you could not spare the time to conduct this search—it may take a good while, you know,—I would go in your place. But I fancy you would rather go yourself."

"Yes, I would rather go myself, thanks. But there is

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something else on your mind, isn't there? You have an idea about Vere's disappearance? What is it?"

"An idea has occurred to me—it would occur to anyone—but I could not speak of it before Miss Dale. Have you heard that Miss Unwin is missing too?"

"Miss Unwin? Yes, I did hear some one say that she was not at the church this morning—that she had left home. But you don't imagine—you don't for a moment suppose that she and Vere have run away *together!* Ha! ha! ha! Excuse me, but the notion is too ridiculous." And, more from the excitement under which he was labouring than from anything superlatively funny in the idea, the young man laughed long and loudly.

"My dear fellow," remonstrated the other, "don't say I said they eloped. I only say it is odd that the two disappearances should have taken place at one and the same time. It may be only a coincidence, but these things generally are *not* coincidences."

"The girl may only have gone home for a day or two."

"Possibly; but it is odd that she did not tell any one where she was going. She left on Tuesday morning."

Tuesday morning! And the telegram had said that Vere had not been at his rooms since Tuesday afternoon! The thought staggered Kenyon for a moment.

"How do you happen to know this?" he asked sharply.

"The Rector told me," answered Shenstone. "He sent to ask me to play something on the organ this morning, as Miss Unwin had bolted—that was his expression, I think." Shenstone's tone was mild, so much so that Harold took it as a rebuke.

"You must excuse me, Mr. Shenstone," he said. "This affair has upset me so that I hardly know what I am saying. But I *cannot* believe that my friend has eloped with a woman like Miss Unwin, when he was on the point of being married to a lovely girl like Winnie Denvers."

"It certainly does seem odd."

"Odd! It is impossible! Why, I don't suppose he even knew of Miss Unwin's existence."

"There you are mistaken at all events," said Paul Shenstone quietly.

"How do you know?"

"Simply because I was in Dr. Luxton's waiting-room one day when your friend was down here—not the last time—the time before—and I happened to be looking out of window, and saw him meet Miss Unwin. Whether the meeting was accidental or not I can't, of course, say; but it was friendly enough. He smiled; she blushed—you know the sort of thing—they shook hands, and he turned and walked with her till they passed out of sight."

A housemaid came . . . with a message.

"It is not true!" cried Harold passionately. "That is, I mean, it *can't* be true. You *must* have been mistaken."

"My dear fellow, the thing happened in broad daylight. Others must have seen it as well as I."

"Then he must have met her somewhere before. There may be a perfectly innocent explanation—"

"Oh, certainly! I only mentioned it because you seemed to think the two had not been acquainted. But what do you mean to do?"

"I shall go first of all to the schoolhouse and ascertain all I can about Miss Unwin's departure—find out whether it really seems to be an elopement or not."

"You could not do better."

"Then I shall go up to town this afternoon, and to-morrow I shall visit or send to the hospitals, the police-stations, the

Shenstone paused for some seconds.

houses of all his acquaintances. Is there anything else you think I might do?"

Shenstone paused for some seconds, and when he did speak it was in a hesitating way, as if to speak were an effort to him.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings," he said; "but if you really wish to hear tidings of your friend——"

"Yes?"

"Well, Miss Unwin left this place yesterday morning."

"So it is supposed."

"In that case, if she went to London she would arrive at Paddington about six. I should inquire there if any of the railway people noticed her, and ask whether anyone met her at the station."

Harold turned almost angrily on his companion.

"If you mean that Vere may have met her at the station, I don't believe it for one moment!" he cried.

"I daresay you are right," replied the other in a soothing tone. "I beg you not to imagine that I am accusing your friend of running off with the schoolmistress. I only say it is queer that he and this Miss Unwin should have disappeared on the same—about the same time; and that common sense suggests that if you want to find him you should try to trace the lady's movements."

"It is a thousand chances to one that anyone should have noticed Miss Unwin at Paddington—supposing she went to London."

"Quite true. I'm afraid it's a poor chance. But when you have exhausted all other means of finding Mr. Vere, it might be worth trying—that's all."

Upon this the two men parted, and Harold, as he walked rapidly on to the village, told himself that he had been unreasonably angry.

He was quite aware that he was considerably prejudiced against Shenstone, because he was to marry Katherine Dale; but that was no reason why he should resent Shenstone's drawing an inference from the facts which many people would consider a very probable one. So he resolved to try to master his prejudice and meet Kate's successful lover in a more friendly way the next time chance threw them together.

(To be continued.)

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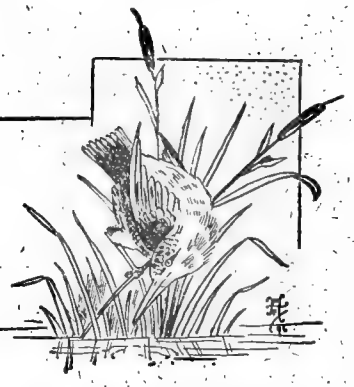
THE PITY OF IT.



They were two jolly girl bachelors. For several years they had worked together, lunched and dined and breakfasted together, shared one another's heart secrets and been inseparable companions. Men who knew them called them ideal women. When one felt sad and heart-sick and given over to the little moods that make a girl wretchedly, miserably woe-begone, the other was always there to comfort or laugh the tears away.

No. 57, Lauder Buildings, with its tiny corners filled with downy sofa cushions was the resting place for more than one weary friend, who would drop in during the evening for a cup of fragrant tea and a comfortable chat. The little brass tea-kettle would hum a busy roundelay and join in the arguments as sturdily as if its fat little body contained a fairly good pair of lungs.

Margaret was the elder of the two girls. She was always the same good-natured, laughing Margaret, but was, nevertheless, a young woman with ideas of her own and any amount of wilful determination. Their men friends raved over Margaret's pretty face, but she sadly lacked the graceful, pretty ways that so soon disappear when a girl enters the busy world of business. Her whole appearance was that of a well-informed, independent young woman who was quite content with her masculine manners and airs of a happy girl bachelor. As to Dorothy, the other girl—well, she wasn't what one would call a pretty girl. Her nose was a trifle too saucy and her mouth could have been smaller. But she had wonderfully soft and fluffy hair that curled round her ears and then tied itself in a silky knot on the top of her head.

Her eyes were always bright and were of that tender brown that one so seldom sees.

During her working hours she was modestly demure, and would never have been noticed at all, but for the reason that she wore such plain and unassuming dresses. But at home she would dress herself in marvellous costumes of white material, with many ruffles of filmy lace, and knots of pale tinted ribbons.

They were so unlike, these two girls, yet they drifted through life, each firm in her belief that no other girl lived who was quite so unselfish, so sweetly dear and so thoroughly good as her friend.

"We must be nice old spinsters, Margaret, dear," Dorothy used to say. "Or cross old maids with corkscrew curls and plenty of cats and parrots, you know, because if you were to marry and leave me I'd die from loneliness, and I'm sure you couldn't live without me."

"Indeed I could not," Margaret would answer. "But I feel sure that you will be the first one to desert our little nest."

"How can you say such dreadful things?" and Dorothy's mouth would pucker up in a most melancholy manner.

Secrets were unknown to them. Love letters were always read and commented on and considered the rightful property of both girls. Simple Dorothy would dilate at great length over her love affairs, and many a laugh did they both have when Jack Ryerson took it into his head to fall in love with her.

Jack was an artist. Not at all like the fascinating fellow in the story books, who wears velvet coats and lives in a dusty and romantic studio, but a well-built man who was employed in the art department of a commonplace publishing house. He recognised Margaret's stately carriage and her well-chiseled features, but his artist's soul was quite enraptured with Dorothy's quaint little figure and dainty manners.

"Sometimes I think that Dorothy isn't a real live girl at all," he once remarked to Margaret. "When she stood there in the doorway a moment ago, with her head tilted to one side and her hair looking so pretty, I couldn't help wondering if I were not actually looking at some old painting."

Dorothy was very fond of Jack. They used to have jolly times when she posed for his pictures, and in fact Jack Ryerson's sketches of pretty girls were unrivalled and the envy of all his fellow-workers. After each of their little sketching *séances*, Dorothy would tell Margaret all about what Jack said, and how he said it and what she said back. But one evening after Jack had gathered up his crayons and departed, Dorothy marched off to her own room without the customary chat. Margaret was alarmed, she brought out the mandoline and sang in the hopes that Dorothy would emerge from her den to have her ruffled spirits smoothed down. But no Dorothy appeared. It was after midnight and Margaret has been asleep for some time when she is aroused by a white robed figure that glided silently to her side, slid two very cold arms around her, and with a dismal little tremble, sobbed:

"Maggy, darling. I'm so wretched and unhappy!"

"Dorothy," Margaret gasped, "you'll catch your death; go back to bed and go to sleep."

"Sleep?" queried Dorothy. "I can't sleep. I haven't slept for a week. I got some powders from Dr. Hall to-day and he said that I was just nervous and tired out and needed rest, but he doesn't know anything. He——"

"Is it Jack, Dolly?" and Margaret looked into the fine brown eyes that shone in the moonlight.

I don't know myself," Dorothy doubtfully replied,

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"but I presume it is. I feel as if I hadn't a friend in the world when he's not with me, and I am too happy to breathe when he's here." Margaret smiled just then. "And that's what makes me cross and that's what makes me hate myself so. He probably says all those pretty compliments to every woman he meets. I know that he is one of those dreadful men that makes love to a girl just because he likes to and because it's as natural as breathing to him. And I loathe him. I loathe everybody but you ——" and then, with her heart unburdened and her face all damp, she buried her head on Margaret's shoulder.

* * * * *

Things were never quite the same after that. Somehow Margaret seemed less sympathetic, and Dorothy felt that she was no longer interested in her foolish affairs. Jack and Dorothy began to find comfort in their little quarrels that only those who are in love indulge in.

At last, one day their argument ended most unfortunately and, although Jack wasn't really serious, Dorothy felt sure that he was, and was quite broken-hearted.

"You do make me so unhappy," she pouted. "I almost wish that you'd go and drown yourself or hang yourself—do anything so that I'll never see you again. You keep me perfectly miserable all the time."

"Dolly! Sweetheart!" Jack pleaded. "Forgive me, I was only teasing you. I love you with all my heart!" Then noticing her sneering smile, he said desperately: "But you don't believe it."

"No, I don't," Dorothy answered pettishly. "How many girls have you said that to? How far down on the list do I come? Really, now, but doesn't your conscience trouble you when you think of all the feminine hearts that you have broken? But I presume you have become hardened to it," and then Dorothy started up a series of hysterical bursts of merriment.

"If I could only prove it, dear, I would," Jack ventured.

"Of course you can't prove it," Dolly gasped between laughs. "It is quite impossible to prove anything that is not true, you know."

"Dorothy, I can't understand you," was all Jack said, and slowly gathered together his scattered pencils, and put them in his pockets and departed without another word.

As he went out into the shadows of the street he was half inclined to rush back and entreat her to believe him. He did love her. To be sure, he had told other girls that he had loved them, but his regard for them had never been just like the affection he had for Dorothy. He would give his life for that moody, tearful bit of femininity that he had left curled up in a big arm-chair. He kept saying to himself in an insane sort of fashion: "Will you, Dorothy; I love you."

Then when he found that he had wandered for half-an-hour with the chill air cutting his face and making his ears tingle he laughed silently and said: "But I'll tease her. I'll pretend to make love to Margaret. By Jove! Why didn't I think of that before?"

A few days after that Dorothy was missed from her desk at the office, and for the first time since the beginning of their friendship Margaret lunched alone. During the long hours Dorothy wandered about Lauder Buildings, now plucking leaves from the geraniums in the window, now standing before the large mirror in the wardrobe smoothing her white cheeks, brushing back the curls from her damp forehead and studying her eyes that appeared to have grown suddenly larger. She would smile pityingly as she looked and laughingly whispered to the image that mocked her every movement. "He doesn't love you! How could he? He doesn't! He says that he does, but he really doesn't!"

And then she would wander back to the little desk and turn over the envelopes addressed to Margaret in the writing that she knew quite as well as her own.

But when Margaret went home that night Dorothy was like her old self. There was a bright spot on either cheek, and Margaret thought she had never seen Dorothy look sweeter. After dinner they sat down before the fire, Dorothy with her head in Margaret's lap and Margaret's arms round her. They talked over every happy hour they had spent together. And when the time came to say good-night, and Dorothy had kissed Margaret as was her custom, Margaret puzzled over the tear that had fallen on her hand.

Dorothy had planned it all that afternoon. Three powders, Dr. Hall had said, would cause the death of a ten year old child, and she had all the powders that he had left with her—there were ten at least. He had cautioned her so carefully, for the medicine was very strong, and an overdose would surely prove fatal. Yes, she felt that she was wicked. Jack loved Margaret. He didn't love her, with her plain face and moody ways. It was Margaret. How could she have been so blind? He knew that she, Dorothy, loved him, so he said all those pretty things to comfort her.

She slipped into the pink eiderdown gown that Jack so admired. She did her hair after the fashion that he professed to have liked best. Mechanically she folded and put away all the stray garments that were lying about the room. From her glove box she took a package that contained several folded bits of paper. Her gloves! They had never looked so pretty before. Her fan, too—but then Margaret could use it.

How her temples throbbed! What made her choke so? Her hands were damp and her heart seemed bursting with grief. Oh, yes, she had almost forgotten. She must say her prayers—she had never neglected them—so she knelt down beside the white bed. For some reason she couldn't frame the words. She could get as far as "Thy Kingdom come," and then she would seem to forget and would mutter:

"Dear old Jack! When I am dead you can marry Margaret and forget all about silly Dorothy. I would not love you if I could help it, and I don't want you to love me because you are sorry for me."

At last she arose. How cramped her limbs were. There were the powders. Taking the cover of her porcelain powder-box, she emptied the contents of all the white papers in it. Her hands trembled when she raised it to her lips, but she grew strong, and in a moment was staring vacantly at the little cover with its feathery coating of powder. The bed seemed so far away. She tottered towards it. How soft the pillows felt! She was sleepy, too. What sweet music she heard, and who had brought all the flowers that were floating through the air?

There was an odour of jasmine—Jack was so fond of Jasmine. Jack! Why, there was Jack! Dear Jack! He did love her after all. It wasn't Margaret at all. If she could only run her fingers through his hair, but somehow she couldn't move her hands. Ah! Jack came closer then. Yes, yes, it was really Jack. She felt his warm breath against her cheeks, but she couldn't see him any more. Everything was so blue and dark. And as Jack's lips met hers, he knew that never now could she be his wife.

MADGE MORRIS.

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Dismissing his servant for the night, Jacque shut himself up in his library, where a clear wood-fire was burning briskly, and, slightly lowering the flame of the lamp, he was soon absorbed in a book.

The little clock on the mantel struck ten silvery strokes, and in the silence that followed, the ringing of the street bell sounded shrilly through the apartment. As he was not expecting anyone, he did not stir. A second peal sounded, and this time he arose and, taking the lamp, went to open the door.

A dark form awaited him in the vestibule. In the light thrown sharply out by the lamp-shade, Jacque recognised his wife.

"You!" he stammered.

She did not move, she did not speak, but stood silently waiting.

Above them opened the shaft of the stairway, down which the single jet of gas cast a softened light, as of dusk. The sound of voices ascended to them from a lower floor.

"Come inside," he said.

He led the way to the library and made her sit down in an easy-chair, and then they looked at one another. It was five years since he had seen her. One evening she had left him; coming home, he had found the house empty, with a note on the table—two lines of farewell hurriedly scrawled in pencil.

Now, after five years of absence, she had come back, she was there opposite him, handsome still, but with an intangible suggestion of extinguishment, of dejection, of being faded, revealed in her air of weariness and suffering. She was dressed in a simple black gown, so worn that it shone at the elbows, and the seams were white. A strand of silver showed among the brown tresses on her brow. It seemed to Jacque as if something within him were sealed up, dead, for he was not at all moved.

Then, as he did not question her, she told him in a few words, without pretence of shame, that, abandoned in her turn, she had been alone since the evening before, that she had spent the entire day crying. She had eaten nothing, had gone out in the evening, wandered aimlessly about, found herself at his door, and had come in.

Still he said nothing, and in the chill silence five years of their life passed before their mental vision, his five years for him, and her five years for her.

When she had left him, when he had found the house empty, it had been the destruction of all his joys, the shattering of his happy life; he had thought he could never recover from the blow, and he had lived on like a broken thing, feeling his reason totter. That had lasted six months—a year. No news of her had come to him, and the hope that kept vigil in the ruins of his home died, too. Then he had ceased to think, had let himself drift like a wreck, like a lost thing. His home, a luxurious little nest, had redeemed him: he had been recalled to himself by being in his accustomed rooms, surrounded by familiar furniture; forgetfulness had come to him as it comes after all great griefs, as it comes at the end of all things, and Jacque had settled down to the even, satisfied life of an old bachelor.

She who had deserted him to run after what is thought to be happiness, had imagined herself happy, a queen, for six months, a year, just the time he had spent in lamenting and suffering. But the awakening had been terrible. Her passion satiated, she had judged in cold blood the man she had chosen, for whom she had

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broken all restraints, braved the conventions of the world, and denied her vows. He was small, mean, not to be compared with her husband, and the life of which she had serenely dreamed, a life of joy and unalloyed delight, had become her crucifix.

For five years, tied to that man, she had tasted drop by drop the bitterness of that loveless, faithless, sunless life, until the day when she knew the desolate despair of dead passions. Then money had been lacking, chilling misery had come, and the bond had worn till it broke. In her turn she had found herself abandoned, weeping in misery and alone.

And now life had brought together again this husband and this wife. He grew stout, commonplace comfortable; she weary, conquered, miserable.

In the silence between them, the noises of the street below sounded distinctly in the room. A cab rattled by, a shopman put up his shutters, a passer-by coughed, and the sound re-echoed in the distance. Jacque moved his keys in his pocket, and their sudden jingling roused him. He recalled his wife's last words.

"You are hungry," he said and he went to the kitchen.

There was some soup still warm, and the remains of a chicken, which he brought in. He served her on one corner of the table, where he spread a napkin, and as she ate, he made another trip to the kitchen and brought back a bottle of wine, from which he filled her glass.

He watched her eat now, saw the colour return to her cheeks, and her hunger satisfied, a sense of content gradually pervade her whole being. When she had finished, they began to talk.

"I have met you twice," she said, almost at ease under the influence of food and warmth. "The first time was three years ago, in a shop. You passed so near, you brushed against me. I turned pale as that napkin, but you went on without seeing me."

He seemed surprised.

"The other time," she continued, "I think you did see me. It was raining, and I was waiting for an omnibus. You came along, and I immediately hurried off, but you followed me. I walked very quickly, but I could hear your steps behind me. Then you lost track of me, for I looked back and you were no longer there."

He did not recall the incident; he was quite sure he had never seen her.

"You!" he stammered.

She went on to tell him that she lived quite near by in the same quarter; and he was astonished that, living so near her, he had been entirely unaware of her existence.

Now she settled back cosily in the chair, feeling relaxed, grown tender. She found this armchair just as she had known it before; she found all the things about her in their old places. Nothing was changed; the hangings were the same, the furniture, the ornaments—all had a friendly air, an air of welcome. It was good to be in this home, of which she was taking possession again after five years' absence. For did not this dinner on the corner of the table attest their reconciliation? The lamp on the table was the same that had lighted them when they kissed each other in the old days. It was all at an end now—that equivocal existence, the misery and disgust of those five years of slavery. She would resume her place in her home beside the husband who forgave her; she would make many happy days for herself after this leaf which was torn from her life.

Jacque considered her calmly, without anger and without tenderness. There came to his lips no words of pity. The woman seated there was an entire stranger to him. The other woman, she whom he had loved, the wife, no longer existed; his love was dead, and it seemed to him he could feel its ashes under his restless fingers.

Without a word he went into another room, and returned with a piece of paper—a bank-note for one hundred francs — which he handed to her.

"You have need of money," he said, "and if you should be in want again, pray let me know."

He took up the lamp and waited for her to rise. As one in a dream, she looked at him, followed him. At the door, as he opened it, she comprehended that her dream was ended, that he was sending her away, that she should return to the black street, to her cold, bare lodging, that he was implacable.

Her eyes implored him. Jacque opened the door as if he did not see her. When she was in the vestibule he held his lamp aloft, flooding her with light, as when she entered, and repeated in a calm voice that seemed to have a casual gentleness in it:

"When you are in need, pray let me know."

And the door was closed upon her. In the silence he heard her tottering steps descend the stair.

Louis de Robert.

"AN INDIAN DRUG"

is the title of a powerful new serial commencing in the next number of SHORT STORIES. The writer is "Huan Mee," author of "In Masquerade," "Alan Lindow's Wife," etc., etc., which in itself is a guarantee that the story will be of more than ordinary interest.

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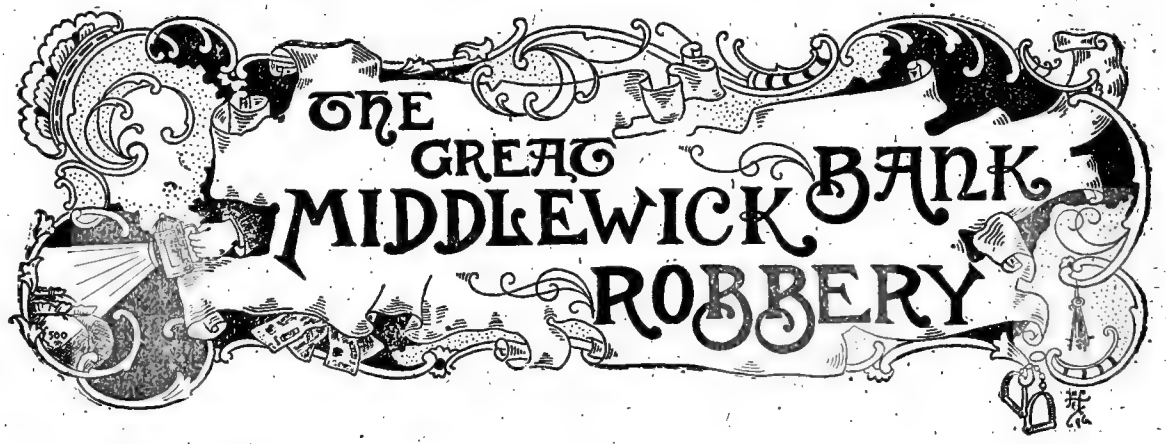

CHAPTER XXII.

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, Burton went round to the hotel where he knew Taylor to be anxiously awaiting him. When the door was locked and the two were alone, Burton asked:

"Have you any news to communicate?"

"No, I spent the evening, or rather a part of it, in completing my preparations for leaving Middlewick."

"Yes, we are both off to-day, having finished the saddest task either of us ever performed."

"I strolled past 'Glenmora,' also Rutherford's place, last night, but think both he and Mr. Bryant were out."

"Yes."

"I am waiting, Phil, for the particulars."

Thereupon Jack Burton, beginning at the point when he assumed the character of an innocent, unsuspecting farmer driving homeward with a miserable animal, related everything that had taken place while he was playing that part.

"There is the whole story," he concluded, "and the question is what is the next thing to be done?"

"Our work was to discover who stole the twenty thousand pounds, and that has been done. The episode of the four burglars has resulted badly—that is, for them. Since they are disposed of, they need no further consideration."

"Yes, that is so."

"The money having been recovered, all that remains is to restore it to the bank."

"But how? Suppose you or I go down there and hand the package to Mr. Bryant, what sort of story shall we give by way of explanation?"

"Simply that we have succeeded in recovering the funds but we cannot give particulars."

"That course was so direct that it is the one which instantly occurred to me, but fatal objections are in the way."

"Why not tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"That is, I know, usually considered the safest plan, but there are exceptions, and this is one of them. Reflect, and you will see the consequences are likely to be of the gravest character."

There was silence between the two men for a few minutes, and then Burton said:

"The first thing, I think, is for one of us to go and see Mr. Bryant at his private house. You came here in response to his request for a detective. He has known you as such all the way through. I simply play the part of watchman to the bank, and he still looks upon me as nothing more than a watchman. That fact will serve as a barrier between us, and, therefore, I consider you are best suited to interview him, as the utmost confidence must exist between Mr. Bryant and the one who takes the money to him."

"All right, then, it shall be as you wish. The sooner we begin, the sooner will come the finish—come in," in answer to a knock, and quickly unlocking the door. A page boy stood outside with a card, which he handed to Taylor. The latter glanced at it, and telling the lad to wait outside, closed the door again.

"What do you think of *that*," asked Taylor, passing the card to his friend, who read:

"Miss May Denton."

Underneath her name the young lady had written in pencil:

"Must see you at once, on a matter of the utmost importance, otherwise I should not take the liberty of calling."

"She'd better come up, I suppose, but what's to become of you meanwhile?" said Taylor.

"I'll wait in my room till she's gone. She hasn't asked to see me, and would probably resent my presence."

That question settled, Taylor instructed the boy to show the visitor up, and Burton went to his own room.

A few minutes later a timid knock sounded at the door, in answer to which the door was thrown open and Miss Denton was ushered in. One glance at her countenance told of the anguish that had prompted so bold a measure. She was pale, and her lips quivered, despite the brave effort she made to repress her agitation.

"There is no danger of our being overheard?" was her first question, when she was seated.

"Not unless we raise our voices, which I hardly think either of us proposes to do."

It was his manner rather than his words which reassured the young lady. She had come with the intention of trusting him fully, as indeed it was important she should do.

"You were surprised to receive my card, Mr. Taylor?"

"Yes, I will not deny that it startled me at first, but I may say that when I came to think things over my surprise passed away. I expected to hear from you to-day."

"Yes, but hardly in the shape of a reception here."

"Perhaps not, but reflection again showed me the best of reasons for that request. I would have been glad to have called at your house, but you could not have guaranteed that we should be wholly alone there, there is no certainty of privacy in the parlour of an hotel, and it was imperative you should see me alone, so this is the only place—that surely is sufficient explanation."

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"May I ask," he added, "before you tell me your errand, whether you are prepared to trust me fully?"

"Quite."

"Thank you. Be assured that that confidence shall be respected to the last degree."

"Do you know my errand?"

"Yes, and if it is any encouragement, let me further assure you that I know *all*."

She looked him in the face, and in a low tremulous voice, hardly above a whisper, said:

"Then I come to plead for mercy."

CHAPTER XXIII.

NOTHING could have exceed the gentle courtesy and delicate consideration which the detective showed towards Miss Denton during this most painful interview. To convince her that he was truthful in declaring that he knew all, as he had asserted, he told everything that he had learned concerning the robbery of the Middlewick Bank.

Then when she began to plead for mercy, he raised his hand in protest:

"Say no more, Miss Denton."

"Oh, how shall I ever thank you," she exclaimed, her face aglow with happiness, "I shall bless you as long as I live. Can it be true, or am I dreaming?"

He repeated his assurances, and a few minutes later escorted her downstairs, saying, as he bade her good-bye, that he would call upon her uncle later in the afternoon.

"And now," he asked, as he rejoined Jack Burton and related what had passed, "shall it be you or I who will visit 'Glenmora'?"

"You are the man."

"As you think best. You will stay in Middlewick until the thing is through?"

"Yes, I may be needed, but I doubt whether Bryant will care to meet me when he knows all."

At the hour named by the banker, in response to Taylor's request for a private interview, the detective presented himself at the door of "Glenmora." The banker himself received him in the hall and led the way to the library, after having given instructions that under no pretext was he to be disturbed.

Taylor's experienced eye was quick to note the pale face and nervous manner of his host. He could not help knowing the subject which was to form the theme of the conversation, but it was impossible to conjecture all that was coming. Nothing was to be gained by circumlocution, and after the the briefest preliminaries, the visitor came to the point:

"Mr. Bryant, as you are aware, less than a week has passed since the robbery of the Middlewick Bank. Twenty thousand pounds was taken from its vault, and carried away by someone whom it is evident knew the combination by which the lock was opened. That much you told me yourself, but had you so willed you could have told me more, for you and I both know only too well who that man was. When you saw the twenty thousand pounds placed in the vault of the Bank your temptation came, you who had scarcely ever entertained the thought of dishonesty now decided to steal that money; it was the supreme crisis of your life, and you fell.

"But with all the facilities at your command for doing this great wrong you saw the necessity of preventing suspicion, you displayed the cunning of the most accomplished scoundrel that is now serving time in any gaol."

There was no mistaking this language, but Mr. Bryant compressed his lips and nodded his head, saying:

"Very true."

"You had every facility," I say, "but even then it would not do for you to blunder at any point. The watchman, John Warren, was incorruptibly honest; even if he were not, you wanted no partner in crime, for a partner would compel a division of the plunder, and that did not suit your ideas.

"For years Warren has been troubled with rheumatism, and, as he admitted, has been accustomed to sleep away part of his nights on duty. But he was liable to awake, and it would not do for you to be seen, even though he had no right to question your actions. So you gave him a bottle of medicine for his rheumatism, with instructions to take it early in the evening. He did so: it contained a drug which forced him to sleep like a log for ten hours——"

"How do you know that?" interrupted Mr. Bryant, starting with alarm. "It is true, but how did you find it out?"

Easily enough. The fact that the man slept so soundly was suspicious and he was questioned. He still had the remainder of the medicine you so kindly gave him. Its odour betrayed the presence of laudanum. He had no suspicion, nor will he ever have, of the trick played on him."

"Where's the bottle now?"

"Smashed to fragments and the contents gone."

"Thanks—thanks for doing that."

"It is not I who did it, but another. One of the truest friends you ever had. He managed it so well that Warren will never have room for an inkling of the truth."

"But who is this man—this friend, as you call him?"

"One moment. Having disposed of Warren, you went to the Bank at midnight, opened the outer door with your own key, did the same to the vault, took out the money and went home.

"In order to more effectually throw dust into the eyes of others, you applied to Mr. Philip Cairns, Chief of the National Detective Agency, for help in tracing the burglars and recovering the funds. You supposed he sent but one detective here—myself—when he really sent a couple."

"Who was the second?" asked the astonished man.

"He came to you as Jack Burton, highly recommended by a banker friend of yours, so highly recommended indeed that you engaged him off-hand as watchman."

"And *he* is a detective," repeated the amazed host.

"Rather," replied Taylor with a smile, "and a pretty good one too, for he is Philip Cairns himself."

Mr. Bryant started, as well he might, at this announcement, for no suspicion of Jack Burton had ever entered his mind.

Taylor paused a moment, that the full effect of his words might not be lost, and then he proceeded:

"Philip Cairns is my superior in every respect, and he had not been down here very long when he suspected the truth, *i.e.*, that only one person was concerned in the robbery of the Middlewick Bank, and that that person was its trusted Manager. It was one thing, however, to suspect, another to prove, and to establish that suspicion became his special work and province."

"What first directed suspicion to me?" asked the host, growing interested in the narrative, despite himself.

"Several things. The first, perhaps, resulted from the fact that you were one of the two to whom the secret of the safe combination was known, although, indeed, it was quite probable that Rutherford had discovered it for himself.

"A study of those three individuals led us, at first, to suspect your book-keeper, but Mr. Cairns was not fully satisfied. I may say that when you first called on the new watchman, I was with him, and hid in the cupboard. We were in the front of the building when we saw the white gleam of the letter as it was pushed under the door, Cairns hurriedly opened the door and told me to follow the person whose stealthy footsteps we plainly heard. I tried to do so, but was a minute too late."

"Do you know who that man was?" asked the Bank Manager with a grim smile.

"Yes, I am talking to him now. Neither of us saw you, but although you ran very quickly for a man of your years, your new 'watchman' afterwards learnt your identity.

"Once we suspected that Rutherford was associated with you in the crime, but that letter convinced us of our error. In the first place you began to grow uneasy over the fact

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that the services of a detective had been solicited by you. You proposed the compromise, hoping you could bring it about and secure the majority of the plunder without further danger to yourself, but it is fortunate for you, Mr. Bryant, that your proposition was not acted upon. The discovery of your guilt would have followed, and have become known to the whole community. It was for that reason that Mr. Cairns suppressed it; but he thought you were too good a man to have your life spoiled by a moment's weakness."

"Great Heavens! Why should he think that?"

"You will recall that I came here some days ago with the request for a specimen of Rutherford's handwriting. You gave it to me, but it was really a sample of your penmanship that I was instructed to obtain."

"I never dreamed that you had any purpose in asking for that draft of my letter."

"That obtained, Mr. Cairns and myself sat down and made a careful study and comparison of the two, and the disguised hand in the obviously mis-spelled missive that was pushed under the door of the bank. The conclusion that I reached was that Rutherford wrote the proposition, ostensibly coming from the burglars; I observed many similarities between the two.

"Mr. Cairns, however, formed another opinion, from which he could not be moved. He admitted the resemblance I pointed out, but proved that you laboriously made them for the very purposes of misleading experts in handwriting into the belief that it was written by your book-keeper, anticipating as you did the test to which it was subjected. *That*, Mr. Bryant, is the one act connected with this affair for which I can find neither palliation nor excuse, for it has none."

The Manager leaned his head upon his hand and groaned.

"But the very two who would have suffered most, had your plan succeeded," went on the detective, in cold, even tones, "are they who, knowing the truth, are most anxious to shield you. Your niece was more observant than you suspected. She attributed your strange conduct after the robbery to something more than worry over the loss of the funds."

"Rutherford was convinced," continued the detective, "that you would visit the hiding place of the money, whether you intended to return it or not. He followed and saw you when you halted by the rock with the intention of satisfying yourself that the packet was where you had placed it. Unfortunately, however, his interest became so absorbed that he betrayed himself. In answer to your angry threats he met you calmly and began an earnest expostulation and plea. Finally he exacted your solemn pledge to return the funds, and went home in the early dusk of last night."

"But," faltered Mr. Bryant, "when did he tell you this?"

"Neither Mr. Cairns nor I have exchanged a word with him. There was a third person who witnessed your interview. He dared not draw near enough to overhear what was said, but it was easy for him to judge from your actions what passed between you."

"With so splendid a chance before you, you were still weak, and for some little time after Rutherford left you, you stood irresolute."

"You are not precisely right," said the banker with a sigh. "When you saw me hesitate, it was not because I faltered in my promise to return the money to the bank, but rather was I trying to decide how to do it and still keep the truth hidden from others."

"I am glad to hear that, and I may say it was not I, but Philip Cairns, who was the third person present. When at last you stooped down to remove the notes, you found——"

"*They were gone!*" broke in Mr. Bryant, jumping from his chair and pacing up and down the library, overcome by excitement. "Yes, they had been taken by someone else, and now it is obviously beyond recovery."

"Stop, stop! This is too grave a matter for trifling; hear me through, I beg of you. After you left the opening in the woods, with Rutherford, Cairns, who was hidden among the trees, and who read aright the meaning of your action, went to the rock and drew out the package of notes intact——"

"WHAT!"

"It is as I tell you," interposed the detective, motioning him back to his seat.

Taylor slipped his hand into his breast-pocket. At this question he drew it out and tossed the package over to the banker. "There it is; not a penny missing. Gracious, man! Don't faint."

With a perceptible effort, Mr. Bryant regained his self-control, and said:

"But—Mr. Taylor—how—shall I explain the return of the money?"

"Tell the directors that the detectives secured it, but will give no further information. I presume they are like the average bank directors, and will be so pleased at the recovery of the funds that they will care little about bringing the criminals to justice, especially as they will save a goodly sum by not making the attempt.

"Our firm will send you an account for the services of Mr. Cairns and myself, so good-bye."

With a hearty handshake the two men parted, and so ends the great mystery of the Middlewick Bank.

The End.

A BRILLIANT SUCCESS.

A very successful *Melody* concert, in connection with the new Musical Magazine, was given on Saturday at St. James's Hall, the most interesting feature, perhaps, being the presence of the distinguished French composers, Gabriel Fauré and Gabriel Pierné, both of whom conducted their own works, for which a special orchestra, under the leadership of Mr. Arthur Bent, had been engaged.

The vocalists comprised Miss Esther Palliser, who sang in her usual finished manner Godard's "Hour of Love," Fauré's "Notre Amour," and Weber's "Softly Sighs." Mdlle. Landi's fine voice showed to perfection in Fauré's "Chanson du Pêcheur" and "Les Roses d'Ispahan," and in the second part in Gounod's "Mignon." Mr. Edward Lloyd enchanted everybody, and was encored in Godard's "Angels Guard Thee" and F. Clay's "Shades of Evening." Mr. David Bispham's cultivated style was heard to advantage in Gounod's devotional song, "Rest in Peace," and Adela Maddison's two songs, "Liebe" and "O, That 'Twere Possible."

M. Johannes Wolff played in his usual masterly manner two pieces by Pierné, "Berceuse" and "Serenade;" Saint-Saëns' "Serenade" and Wieniawski's "Valse," the latter of which received a well-deserved encore, and was responded to with Fauré's "Berceuser."

The first part concluded with a "Pavane" by Fauré, a most graceful and finished composition, in which Miss Esther Palliser, Mdlle. Landi, Mr. David Bispham, and M. Bagès took part.

The orchestra played Sellenick's "Marche Indienne" in a most spirited manner, their other items being Cowen's "Language of Flowers" (three numbers), and Sullivan's Incidental Musical to "Henry VIII." ("Processional March" and "Graceful Dance"). We must not forget to mention two characteristic pieces by Pierné which made a marked impression, the one being "The Vigil of the Guardian Angel," and the other, "March of the Little Tin Soldiers," the latter of which is sure to achieve popularity, and which appeared in Number Two of *Melody*.

The majority of the songs and instrumental pieces rendered at this concert will be found in the numbers of *Melody* already published. *Melody* appears on the first of every month, price Sixpence nett, and its contents consist of a variety of delightful pieces for the piano, violin, mandoline, and other instruments, besides various songs by eminent composers.

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THE TALE OF A CAT.

When I first met George Herne he impressed me as being a remarkable man. He was well educated, even learned, yet in conversation he imparted his knowledge without a suspicion of pedantry. He was an omnivorous reader, was ever ready to converse on any subject that came up, and his conversation was brilliant. Withal he was a good fellow. I never met a man that took such complete possession of me on so short an acquaintanceship. When I had met him half-a-dozen times I counted him among my best friends.

Most men that are graduates of two universities and have improved their time at each are oppressed with a sense of their own erudition, and are anything but good comrades. Not so with George Herne. Though he had made the most of his time at Oxford and afterwards at Heidelberg, and at the latter university had dipped deep into German philosophy, his intellectual training had not caused him to lose the faculty of enjoying life, nor the power of contributing to its enjoyment by others. Among men of the world he was a man of the world, and a delightful one; among his friends that chose to draw him out he was an entertaining philosopher. However, his talk was so frequently illuminated with flashes of imagination, that I often thought that he believed, with Hamlet, that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in his philosophy.

I had known him less than a year when one day, while strolling along Piccadilly, I encountered him as he was leaving his club.

"Come," he said, putting his arm in mine, "let us go for a walk in Regent's Park. It is a beautiful afternoon and everybody will be there."

I acquiesced. When we reached the Zoo, we paused for a few minutes to look at the animals, in which my friend seemed to take a great deal of interest.

"Do you know," he said, "I never look at animals without thinking of the doctrine of metempsychosis, and wondering whether or not their bodies contain souls that once inhabited human forms. Oh, you needn't laugh," he added, in answer to the smile I could not suppress. "Look at that camel's face. See its expression now. Is it not like your friend Jameson's?"

I had to admit it was like Jameson's.

"Well, why may not the soul of one of Jameson's ancestors be in that camel?" he continued. "And then look at the monkeys. Are not their faces grotesquely human?"

I agreed with him as to the monkeys, but said that they did not convert me to a belief in the doctrine of metempsychosis.

"Well," said my friend musingly, "I confess that I am a good deal interested in the doctrine, notwithstanding the poor repute in which it is now held. It has always had an extraordinary fascination for me. I could tell you of a strange adventure into which I was led through my interest in it."

"Tell me," I said. I began to be interested in this new phase of my friend's character, for he had never before spoken to me in this strain.

As we continued to stroll northwards in the park he related his adventure.

"One afternoon," he said, "I had been poring over some old books and indulging in speculations in regard to the transmigration of souls until my brain was in a whirl. I tried to dismiss the subject from my thoughts, but in vain. To get rid of the confusion of ideas that was making a maelstrom of my mind, I started in the evening for a walk along the Embankment.

"The moon, which was full, was coming up, and its light gradually brought into relief the objects about me. Even the shapes of the hieroglyphics on the obelisk were distinctly outlined. Of course, Cleopatra's Needle turned my thoughts to Cleopatra. I wondered if the soul of the fair Egyptian still haunted the earth, and if so, whether or not she ever came to look at this monolith, so long associated with her name. I wondered in what form she now appeared. Had her soul, I asked myself, suffered transmigration into an animal of a lower order, or had it been reincarnated in a human body?

"While musing thus my eyes were fixed on one of those great black mythological figures that support the obelisk at its corners and maintain its balance on its pedestal. Suddenly the figure at which I was looking seemed to move, and to spring from the pedestal, alighting on one of the stone flags only a few feet away from me. I expected to see the obelisk tumble. The figure, however, had not stirred, but a large black cat that had been crouching within its extended claws had jumped down and stood there in the moonlight gazing at me with great flaming eyes. She was the most graceful creature I ever saw. There was neither fear nor anger in those feline eyes, but a strange, fascinating look, that seemed to say, 'Follow me,' as the cat, with an easy movement, went down the Embankment and walked toward Charing Cross. 'It is Cleopatra!' I exclaimed.

"You think the idea absurd," continued Herne, as he caught my look of amused incredulity. "But you would not smile if you could understand the feeling that possessed me at the time. I was as firmly convinced that the cat was Cleopatra as I am that we are sitting here.

"Impelled by an irresistible influence, I followed the cat. Athough she moved faster than I, she paused now and then, and, turning to look at me, waited until I drew near. Then she moved forward again. When she reached Charing Cross she led me off into Leicester Square, and went down one of the streets leading out of it. I followed, keeping the cat in sight. At last she ascended the steps leading to a handsome brown-stone house. She paused, watching me approach her. When I was only a short distance from her she leaped into a little balcony in front of the parlour floor, and entered the house by an open window.

"When I tell you what I then did, perhaps you will say that the cat had hypnotised me. I myself have never been able to account for my action nor for the strange incident to which it led. What I did was to ascend the steps and ring the door-bell. The door was opened by a small copper-coloured, Oriental-looking man in livery. My intent was to inquire about the cat. What I said was: 'Is Cleopatra here?' A peculiar smile flitted across the visage of the servant as he replied that she was. Mechanically I asked if I might see her, and again the servant replied in the affirmative. I was ushered into the parlour, and then the door was closed.

"If some supernatural power had suddenly whisked me through the air and dropped me into a house in Cairo

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my surroundings could not have been more Egyptian than they were. Everything in the room, from the furniture and the draperies to the smallest piece of *bric-à-brac*, reminded me of Egypt. To make sure that I was not dreaming I pinched myself. I was awake. Although I was in the room into which the cat had disappeared from the balcony, I could see nothing of her.

"Presently the door opened and a beautiful woman appeared. She looked like a daughter of the Ptolemies. Her natural Egyptian appearance was intensified by her costume, which might have come from one of the bazaars of Alexandria. I stammered an excuse for my presence, relating the incident of the cat, and saying that I had a great desire to know her history, and, if possible, to purchase her. My words surprised the fair Egyptian, who said she had no cat, and had never seen the animal I described. I learned from her that she was known among her acquaintances as Cleopatra, and she said that when I asked for Cleopatra, she supposed I was one of her friends. She told me her real name, and I remember that a friend of mine had spoken to me of her as an interesting and eccentric woman. I made further excuses for my unceremonious visit and retired.

"I afterwards met Cleopatra at a reception, and was formally presented to her. She invited me to call on her, and I have since been a frequent visitor at her house. I confess that I have become deeply interested in her. However, she is a greater mystery to me than ever. She tells me that she supposes she is an Egyptian, though she knows nothing of her parentage. She is supplied with a large income from an unknown source. She has tried to learn whence it comes, but in vain. Two of her servants, a man and a woman, are Egyptians, and have been in attendence on her as long as she can remember. They know, or pretend to know, as little as she in regard to her parentage.

"The cat that was the cause of our meeting is as great a mystery to me as Cleopatra. I have learned from one of the servants that although the cat has never been seen in the house when the mistress was there, she has often appeared when the mistress was absent. The servant accounts for this from the fact that Cleopatra has a great aversion to cats, and says that the cat undoubtedly understands it. But I sometimes think there is more than that in it."

As he said this Herne drew out his watch and, glancing at it, added: "It is nearly time for her to appear."

"Who?" I asked.

"Cleopatra, of course," replied my friend. "She drives in the park every pleasant afternoon, and usually passes about this time. There she is!" he exclaimed, pointing to a handsome equipage.

In the carriage sat a beautiful, dark, low-browed woman, who turned her eyes on Herne, whom she recognised with a gracious bow. As her carriage disappeared amid a hundred others that were dashing up and down the drive, Herne said: "Is she not beautiful?"

"Very beautiful," I replied.

* * * * *

A few days after Herne related his adventures to me I was called from the city and remained away over a month. On the evening following my return I went to his club. Not finding him, I inquired of one of his friends in regard to him. I was astounded with the information that he was in an insane asylum. It was said that he entertained the strange hallucination that he had been engaged to marry a woman in whom the soul of Cleopatra was reincarnated, and that the engagement had been broken off because he accused her of being a witch and transforming herself at times into a black cat that haunted the obelisk on the Embankment.

On the other hand, several of Herne's friends intimate that he was declared to be insane through the instrumentality of relatives who conspired to get control of his property. I know not what to believe. I know that my friend was eccentric, but I never thought him insane. I have begun an investigation of the case, and have learned that everything he told me in regard to the woman he calls Cleopatra is true. I shall continue the investigation, and if I am convinced that Herne is unjustly detained, I shall do everything in my power to restore him to freedom. Still, I know not what to believe.

Allen Goodman.

PICTURE ✣ PUZZLE ✣ PRIZE.

No. 6.

£10 TO BE GIVEN AWAY.

On the opposite page is a puzzle picture composed of 88 squares. If these squares be rearranged in a certain order they will form a real picture.

We offer a prize of £10 for the correct solution. In order to give readers in all parts of the United Kingdom as equal a chance as possible, none of the solutions received will be opened until Thursday, May 21st, when all those received will be considered together. In the event of two or more correct solutions being included up to this time, the prize will either be given to the sender of the *neatest* one, or will be divided amongst the correct competitors at the discretion of the Editor. Consolation Prizes will also be awarded.

If no correct solution be received on or before Tuesday, May 26th, 1896, the Ten-Pound Prize will be given to the sender of the solution then to hand which is most nearly correct.

Pictures should be packed flat or folded, not rolled, and the outside wrapper must be marked "August."

N.B.—To make the puzzle more difficult some of the squares have been turned upside down, others sideways.

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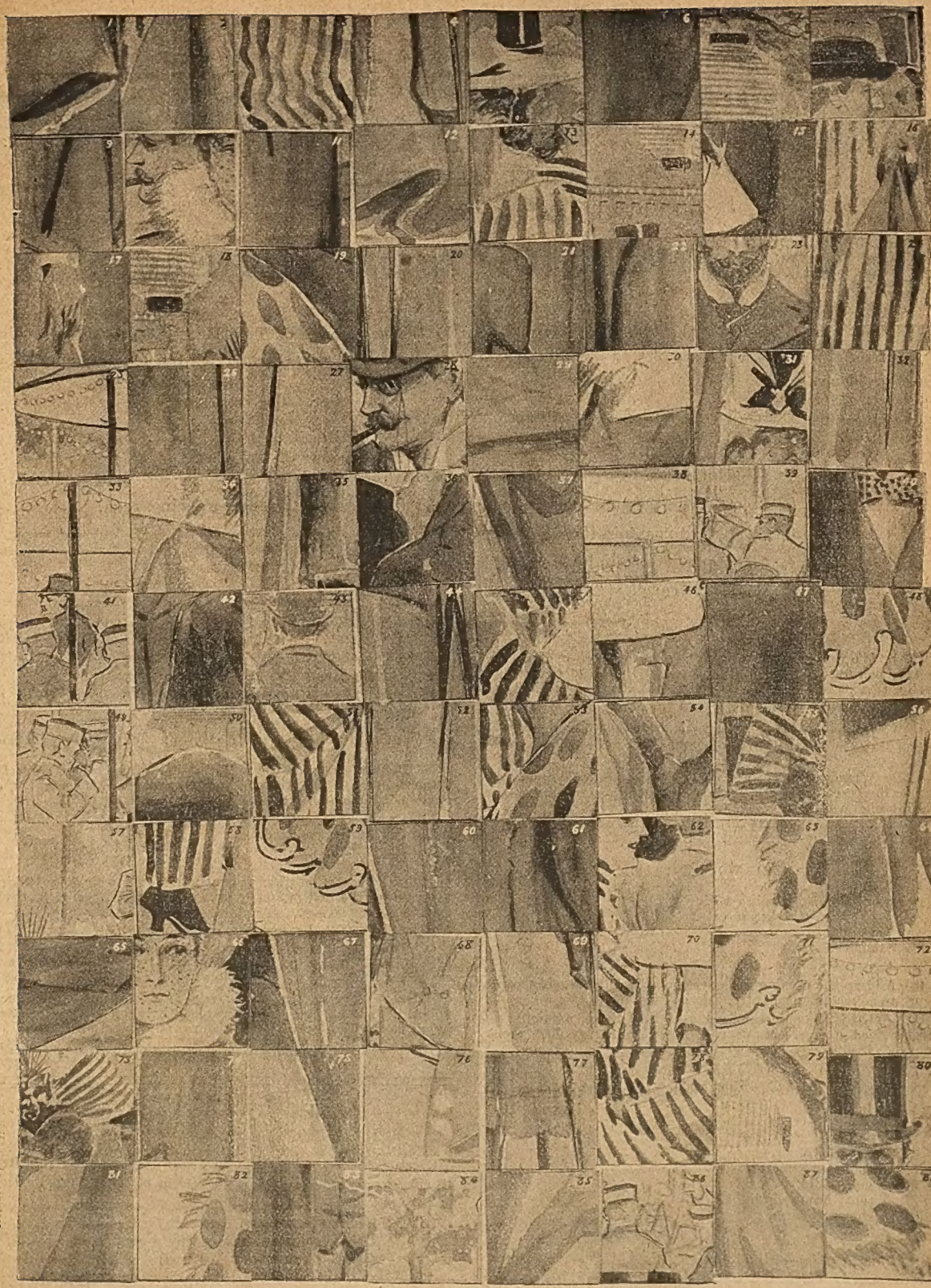

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RULES:

1. All solutions to be written clearly on one sheet of paper.
2. Do not write the questions; simply put the numbers and the answer against each.
3. Each set to contain the £100 coupon (found on second page of cover) for the current week.
4. All attempts to be in by Monday, May 25th.
5. Mark your envelope "GYMNASIUM."

(21.) If a reducing glass, when held at a distance of an inch from a picture, diminishes its size to $\frac{15}{16}$, to what size will it reduce that picture—at the same ratio of reduction—if held at a distance of $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

(22.) How many (1) illustrations and (2) photographs are there in the May number of *Pearson's Magazine*.

(23.) When the necessary letters are placed to occupy the dashes in the following lines, the whole will form a sentence containing nine words:

H—R—E—E—E—T—A—L—F—N—A—O—P—R—U—I—Y
—O—D—S—L—Y—N—T—E—R—E—O—S—

(24.) WORD SQUARE.

1. To bestow.
2. One who competes in running.
3. A family of wingless insects.
4. Vigorous.
5. Salvers.

(25.)

(*a*) Add up the number of figures on this page, each separate figure to count independently, thus: 274 = 13; $\frac{15}{16}$ = 13.

(*b*) What is the monetary value of the whole, assuming the total arrived at represents pence. Thus: Total, say 705; money value £2 18s. 9d.

(26.) ACROSTIC.

The initials of the words defined below signify athletic exercises.

1. A luminant.
2. Besides.
3. Middle.
4. A negative.
5. A fool.
6. A male child.
7. Twenty hundredweight.
8. A chemical term.
9. A fish.
10. To turf.

Each word consists of three letters.

(27.) CHARADE.

My first is to chatter.
My second is an implement for catching fish.
My third is an expression of surprise.
My fourth is a gas measurer.
My whole is an instrument to ascertain the force of magnetism.

(28.) The letters of the following anagrams when correctly transposed spell the titles of articles in the May number of *Pearson's Magazine*.

1. I weld some tools.
2. Her hat is fun, Fred.
3. Her tail.

(29.) Discover on this page those words which by taking away either the first or last letter will have their meaning entirely changed.

Examples: (S)unbrowned, (s)lumber, son(g).

(30.) The following sentence when reconstructed forms a sentence to be found in the May number of *Pearson's Magazine*.

Africa to urging for us the regions of expeditions let such undesirable advantages turn the unhealthy upon emigration have to our most attention with neighbours and done of ever, our.

The punctuation marks are in their correct relative positions.

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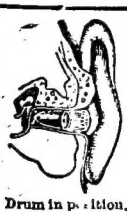

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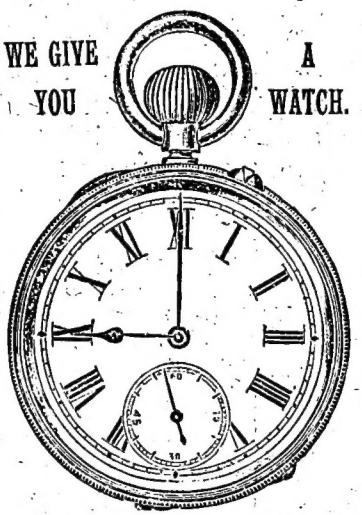

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